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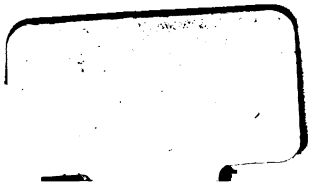
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*The
Gift of
Paul
Clermont
Warrington
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**THE GIFT OF
PAUL CLERMONT**

Books by
Warrington Dawson

LE NÈGRE AUX ÉTATS-UNIS

THE GIFT OF PAUL CLERMONT

THE SCAR

THE SCOURGE

THE TRUE DIMENSION

THE GIFT OF PAUL CLERMONT

Francis
1

BY

1841-1889

WARRINGTON DAWSON



GARDEN CITY, N. Y., AND TORONTO
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TO
THE GREAT HEART WHICH NEVER LOST
CONFIDENCE

THE GREAT GENERAL WHO STEMMED THE
TIDE OF INVASION AT THE MARNE, WHO
SAVED THE POSITIONS ON WHICH THE
ALLIES EVENTUALLY MANŒUVRED TO
DRIVE THE GERMANS FROM FRANCE,
WHO REORGANIZED AND TRANSFORMED
FOR VICTORY THAT PEERLESS AND
SUPREME WEAPON, THE FRENCH ARMY :

MARSHAL JOFFRE

B4T 130221

PART ONE
—
HOPE

THE GIFT OF PAUL CLERMONT

I

As PAUL looked upon Verviller, the river-banks were shaded and secret to the right, where trees rose straight from sodded slopes; practical and animated to the left, where a tow-path ran. An unkempt mill stood among neat little dwellings; then came an arched bridge of stone, beyond which the town swept in a gently rising curve. A tall, thin church-steeple rested with fairy grace against a blue sky so solid that it supported whole pyramids of thick white cloud. The fair, high windows and towering chimneys of a Renaissance château were poised above more modest houses, as the pearls and leaves of a marquis's coronet might rise over the heads of a multitude.

But Paul saw it all with resentful dislike, and for reasons simple and sharply-defined. This was the town where he must live and go to school; to come, he had been torn from the grandfather he loved and from the village where he had attained the dignity of seven years.

"Here, this is the street," said his mother, a woman in the late twenties of a handsome, portly type, with much colour in her cheeks and a quantity of coarse light hair about her head.

"The next, rather," ventured the pale, stoop-shouldered

man in the thirties who was driving them with their household goods.

"I say this one," the mother re-asserted.

The father obediently turned his horse.

It did not prove to be the street, but nobody said anything.

In Arnan, theirs had been a little rustic cottage, close to the single road and separated from it by a garden. They called it a garden, though only vegetables grew there. Opposite was the village inn, to which crowds of strangers came at certain seasons—often as many as eight or nine. The inn had a real garden, with beds of roses and heliotrope, and great trellises of trailing wistaria, and currant bushes and cherry trees, and a fawn scarce bigger than a dog, kept enclosed in a corner with wire netting.

Sometimes, when there were no strangers, the proprietress let Paul play here. He might climb the lower limbs of the cherry trees, and eat the fruit; he might wander among the currant bushes, but only when an older person was near. It seemed unreasonable that he should be watched safely on the ground and not when perilously exploring trees. In the wisdom of mature years—he was at Verviller, then—he reflected that few cherries ever came within reach, whereas the currants lay at unlimited mercy.

One day, when none was observing, he tried to play with the fawn. The little creature dashed out as he loosened the door, and knocked him down. The garden gate stood open, and fields lay beyond; if the fawn got so far, there would be no returning. Paul had enough presence of mind neither to cry out nor to run. Dodging behind trees and bushes, suppressing all unnecessary noise, he

reached the gate and closed it, while the fawn innocently nipped a juicy shrub. Then he called for expert help to assure the capture.

The road where he played daily, and the forest to which he went in fine weather, were unending delights. Thick and soft and hot with its fine whitish dust, the road suggested wonderful games and adventures shared with little Alfred, a baby friend fully two years younger than himself. To the forest, he went with his mother, who said it would be dangerous for Alfred, and boys made too much noise when together, anyhow. She slept over her knitting; or if it were forgotten, would send Paul all the way home, and be asleep under the trees before he returned. He transformed shelters of rock into bandits' caves, and stretches of bracken into jungles. When his mother snored, he would play at lions roaring miles away as they galloped towards him. In a burst of enthusiasm, he confided this to her, and got a smart rap on the head. It was his earliest lesson in discretion.

Bad weather, while cutting him off from these pleasures, brought compensation. From the window he looked out to see huge rain-drops splash down the road. Figures of men, hordes of men marching this way or that. Or again, women hurrying to the fair, each wishing to be first. Sometimes an angry mob appeared, and sometimes an entire army, or two opposing armies. Occasionally, they were all the people in France, going to church; and, most rarely, thousands of priests and nuns—all the priests and nuns in the world.

Conversations with little Alfred who listened, and with his grandfather who didn't, were his sole verbal opportunities. Grandfather would sit very still in a corner until twilight, and then shake himself out of a trance. This

was Paul's hour for lessons. If he preferred to talk instead of thumbing the worn book or teasing scraps of crumpled paper, he met with no opposition. Doubtless imperfect as an educational method, the principles inculcated were so thoroughly impressed upon him that, years later, argument and punishment were powerless to show him a difference between "jé étais" and "J'ai été," or "sens allé" and "s'en aller."

As the evening wore on, grandfather grew garrulous, little caring whether any heeded. This was the cherished secret to many of Paul's imaginings. Grandmother moaned gently because of her "pains," father smoked his pipe over yesterday's paper, mother sat with crossed knees and folded arms and bent back, napping; while Paul, attentive little audience of one, deep in his bed with hypocritically tight-screwed eyes, drank in words about the Franco-Prussian war, and the Commune, and Republicans and Clericals, and like things filled with awful possibilities, fascinatingly evasive.

His father, employed in the tax service, left home early each morning on a bicycle, and came back for a late dinner. One night there was talk of promotion, whatever that might be. It meant they were to live in town, where Paul should go to school and prepare to succeed his father. Paul did not want that: he wanted gardens and forests and a village road. He pinned his faith on grandfather, who was to stay at Arnan with grandmother, and would surely not let him go. When the cart was ready, the furniture stacked in it, his parents called him. He sprang upon his grandfather, beseeching to be saved. But it was in the morning, soon after sunrise, and the old man could find not a word to say.

Their new home, not even a house, had three ground-

floor rooms, with one window opening on a noisy paved street and two on a dark foul court. The farther rooms were tiled; the first boasted a floor of rotting wood. Cold and sunless, the place, until recently a wash-house, reeked with moisture. The wall-paper drooped in flaps and sagged in pockets, sighing and creaking whenever the door opened or closed. Garments which imprudently slipped from a chair or a peg overnight were mould-tainted by morning. After heavy rains, Paul's first task on leaving bed, while his mother made breakfast, would be to clear away diminutive mushrooms from notoriously favourable corners.

This was hard on his mother's nerves, or what she termed nerves. The father, whose health had never been good, was luckily absent save at night, when the lamp had a warming and drying influence. As for Paul, if he could not be at Arnan with grandfather, he found Verviller no worse than other towns fancied upon the same pattern. None of the three complained. Had not Paul's mother herself chosen the rooms, coming especially over, a week in advance?

Paul was taken to the Brothers' school, a big square brown building with double doors one of which swung alarmingly; each of them had a cross of yellow glass as window in the upper panel. The play-ground gate stood ajar; he saw long, low, narrow benches of discoloured wood, resting on legs straddled so far apart that they must collapse under the slightest pressure. Paul was possessed with an infinite desire to sit down on one, very hard. For the moment, he forgot that school was an object for righteous abhorrence.

They went into a high narrow room, his mother and he.

Light sifted through the crosses of yellow glass, tarnished and sickening, upon the white hair and pale features of the Brother Director; it danced in golden dust-patches on his black skirt. Frère Alexandre stretched out a hand to pat Paul's head; it became a greenish, ambered, half-transparent talon.

Cupboards took the place of walls. Frère Alexandre rose and went to one, unlocked it with a grinding key, and reached up to a shelf. Books, books, books were stacked there. Paul had not supposed there were so many books in all the world. The Brother took down a printed book and a blank book, with hands now very fine and white, delicately veined in blue. As Paul, obeying a sign, followed him, he saw his mother leaving without a word. Frère Alexandre must be a wonderful person indeed.

Passing through a huge sad room with benches against the walls and dirty windows and several doors—the play-room for bad weather, the *préau*—they stopped at a closet where a wrinkled old woman enveloped Paul in a black apron. It was not new, but one his mother had made for him; and he found it here in this place he had never seen before. He recognised a spot on one of the wristbands, and guiltily identified a tiny rent on the hem floating between his knees. For weeks after, he puzzled over this. Yet it gave him a sense of familiarity with the surroundings. Besides, that rent might now escape maternal vigilance. For though he wore an apron in the house, like other boys, he did not go out in one, like common boys.

Before Frère Alexandre and himself two big doors stood partly open. In the dimness within, a microscopic light glimmered on an altar, and over it a blue, starry sky was painted so beautifully that Paul gasped with

delight. He hoped they would stop there to pray; not that he knew any prayers. But the Brother led the way up to a class-room, and left him.

Boys in black aprons sat or sprawled on many benches. Facing them, with his back to the window, was the teacher, a tall, thin, blond young man with a small mouth and large teeth, and very blue eyes shining through spectacles. Terrific uproar filled the room; boys, after jumping on the desks, started to race about. The teacher protested in a mildly distressed manner, and was answered that the "new one" must be seen. Order restored itself gradually as his charges tired of romping.

Paul was put on the last bench, near the door. He had one neighbour; of an age near his own, with pink cheeks and crisp curly black hair, and naughty sparkling eyes. The teacher called him Lavenu. Another Lavenu, big and fair and bullet-headed, not at all amusing, had a place at the extreme corner. The two were not brothers, nor even cousins. Paul's neighbour told him this, between licks at barley sugar. Quite remarkable, how this boy ran his tongue the entire length of the stick each time, and then offered to prove by appearances that he was not eating, but the stick was melting.

The printed book given to Paul was an arithmetic, the teacher explained, directing him to study the first page. But these signs were not the alphabet grandfather taught; they were meaningless and uninteresting. At the end of the book, however, they grew in bunches, making almost pictures, with long lines to hold them together and stars or crosses between. Dipping his pen deeply into the ink, Paul traced some of these pretty things in his blank-book. They did not come quite right, but looked well when circles had been drawn round them

with the help of a piece of paper, a pin, and a pen. A pencil would have done better than the pen; but then, the ink splashed very nicely.

Lavenu approved of these proceedings. Only, he would force sticks of barley sugar on Paul, who accepted reluctantly, not knowing how to refuse while not daring to eat, and who stored away six pieces in his desk. When Lavenu offered a seventh, Paul's scruples weakened; refusing it, he plunged down after one of the six already accepted. To his unutterable surprise, the desk was empty. Lavenu laughed, still holding out the new stick. Paul grasped it and had it to his mouth—but his head somehow disappeared into the desk, and his hand held nothing save a gluey sensation. Lavenu told him the sticks had all melted, and that was shameful waste, and he should have no more barley sugar.

At this moment, Paul was called for his lesson. Nervously filling his pen instead of putting it down, he drew it very hard across the page instead of wiping it. Staggered by the result, he closed the book, whereupon black drops oozed out from between the leaves at the bottom, luckily falling on his apron. Another fortunate accident was that he had disfigured only the page he liked, and not the one his teacher wanted. He did not understand the questions put to him as he stood beside the big desk, and answered Yes and No at random; but was presently assured that he had done very well, for the first day.

Shortly after, all the classes together were turned loose in the earthy yard. The bigger boys played games with marbles, or with a ball sent from hand to hand as they cried, "*Passe! Passe toi!*" The smaller boys played in circles, or in complicated scrambles, or else leaped on and off the scatter-legged benches, changing feet each

time. Paul expected that when his immense weight was thrown on, the bench would collapse. It resisted, causing him a sort of disappointed relief.

At the end of three months, Paul and his parents moved to a little house all their own, two rooms on each floor. From his window, he could see trees and meadows, and not too many roofs, and the Mareille; he could hear rumbling and whistling trains, and watch them come or go. In these respects, Verviller scored. Yet Arnan had a charm which increased as the image dimmed.

Almost reconciled with the town, Paul was quite at peace with his school. He did not have to study much, and Lavenu abounded in subjects for awful admiration. The high-voiced, owl-faced teacher never lost patience nor gained firmness.

One month, Lavenu behaved himself, and things were dull. Though accustomed to receiving the yellow certificate of obloquy, each week, and only by miracle the green certificate of tolerable conduct and proficiency, he had received successively three blue certificates reserved for the elect. The fourth week, bringing still another such distinction, conferred automatically upon him the honour of honours, a gorgeous medal on a brilliant red ribbon, to be worn for the whole month following.

Then animation returned to the class-room. Having made an effort in a new direction, Lavenu undertook to demonstrate that his former talents survived, open to improvement. When Paul was pointed out to him as a model, now, Lavenu would shrug:

"He's a stranger, M'sieur. He's from the country. I was born in town. I've got warm blood."

"I shall take your medal away," the teacher would threaten.

"You can't. Mother has sewn it to my apron."

Such scenes generally ended, to the delight of the class, in a mad chase extending all over the room. Then Lavenu, breathless, would roll like a ball under several benches and bowl into the teacher's feet, to be captured gloriously amid whirls of arms and legs. Having produced his dramatic effect, Lavenu would finally retrieve the medal by surrendering with such grace, such completeness, such tears of repentance, such starry-eyed vows for future perfection, that the long-suffering teacher was helpless. And Monsieur would turn away, saving his dignity with solemn admonitions for next time, while Lavenu, resuming his place beside Paul, would wink broadly, one eye after the other.

Yes, school was really agreeable, on the whole. And some day, Paul would be privileged to play with the big boys, and would be in the class taught by Frère Alexandre. That thin pale face and tall black-robed figure seemed to be everywhere and to discover everything. A word of suggestion in that calm voice, while that clear look sounded a boy, accomplished more than threat or punishment. Useless to attempt deceit; the cleverest argument fell short. Frère Alexandre might have been a boy himself, he understood so well what had been intended. All loved him, but those in his class loved him most.

Paul began to get blue certificates. The last week of another month came, and the teacher announced the award of three medals. One for Jean Marie, a gawky boy who wore extraordinary hair, straight and black, hanging down to his waist behind, and shaved to the scalp on the top and sides; he would allow intimate friends to play at "pulling the horse's tail," as he called his back hair. The second for Lavenu—Big Lavenu, the teacher

specified. Whereupon Little Lavenu, who had been writhing like a monkey, proceeded to quack like a duck and, catching both cheeks with his hands, flapped them in imitation of wings. The third was for—Paul Clermont. Howls of protest rose from all the class, because he was the newest boy, and came from the country besides.

Lavenu escorted him home. It was the very medal he had taken off that morning, after kissing it, and from which he had removed the safety-pin so that it should have to be stitched to his apron. Still warm from Lavenu's heart, Paul thought it the most attractive of medals; especially when that nice friend rooted out an ordinary pin, in his shoe, or sock, or mouth, or some absurd place, and decorated him.

The two walked back, in triumphal procession, to the Clermont house; but it was closed. Lavenu, a youth of magnificent resourcefulness, proposed celebrating on the river-bank. Flushed by success, Paul rashly agreed. Since he could be neither at home nor at school, and loitering in the streets was forbidden, he must go somewhere.

By the river they met some friends of Lavenu's. They all played together on the tow-path, and raised much dust and unstinted noise, and were nearly swept into the river by the rope of a boat, and the horse looked as if he might have kicked them. No more perfect day could have been arranged. Then they played singing-games, which Lavenu led:

*"Une souris verte
Qui courait dans l'herbe,
Je l'attrape par la queue,
Je la montre à ces messieurs.*

*"Pim-pon d'or—la bayette, la bayette,
Pim-pon d'or—la bayette est en dehors,
Avec un petit cheval d'or,
Qui"*

Paul never knew what happened to the little golden horse. When he related the affair to me, I might have enlightened him, but judged the detail irrelevant.

His mother had descended upon him. He reached home with a breathless physical sensation, and very few mental impressions. But when his father returned at dinner-time, the situation, from bewildering, grew ominous. All Paul could grasp was that he must tear off the medal and never wear it, and that he should not see Frère Alexandre, nor Monsieur, nor Marcel Lavenue, nor any of his playmates again; for he was to be taken to another school, the Communal school, on the morrow.

II

THE noise of Paul's hob-nailed boots and the brilliant blue of his linen knickers came to break the harmony of my reflections as I sat near my window in the rue du Port. I had noticed this boy before, idly, in a discreet suit of brown corduroy and blessedly noiseless white canvas shoes—as I might have noticed man, pony, or stray cat. So it must have been circumstances made the difference on that day when our eyes first met as strangers.

He seemed not quite thirteen. Under a tight cap worn back on an intelligent head, his dark hair, closely cropped, shone like velvet in the light and marked clean curves to the five points surmounting a well-proportioned forehead. Big round grey eyes were conspicuous in a pale, delicately modelled face. His lips parted on any pretext, to show a gleam of teeth when he smiled bashfully and

a full white row when he smiled wonderingly. The sailor-blouse belonging to the brown suit still served, its broad collar and tie of corduroy displaying a graceful neck.

Two water-jugs, of unequal size and both too heavy for him, swung rather loosely from his hands; he proceeded cautiously, with an occasional sidelong kick to avoid them. Sense of management—appreciation of balance—instinct of responsibility—freedom from the awkwardness usual at his age—so I would have dismissed him. But as the boy neared me, he raised his eyes, and smiled. A broad, wondering smile. My response was a stare so complete and so conclusive that he flushed, smiled bashfully, ducked low, and took several swift steps. Even while hurrying away, he cared for his movements so as not to spill the contents of his jugs.

The look and the smile had implied that he knew me. Why? I had scrupulously avoided acquaintances in Verviller. When I needed an exchange of ideas I went to Paris. What would become of the solitude needed for study, if I were to be watched and identified and remembered here? A whole morning's work had been scattered to the winds by an idle glance and a searching query. Inexplicably, the thread had snapped, had parted from vital things, instead of lying at their root.

When lacking either strength or leisure to reach a hill-top where my happiest hours of ease were spent, I would stroll by the Mareille. The tow-path offered sure footing, close to the water's edge. That afternoon I went thither, to regain peace. But a patter of steel points on the soft pebbly earth, and a dazzling patch of colour which had nothing to do with the green of the trees, told me my fate.

A little friend, barely half his age, trotted at his heels,

carrying the smaller of the jugs—empty. The boy himself caught his breath, grew paler than usual, and turned crimson. Passing me, he hung his head forlornly, without suggestion of the impulsive movement; and so went on to the water-side.

Since morning, I had flattered myself that our exchange of glances had been accidental. Now, I knew he had had some reason of his own for smiling up at my window; I knew, too, that my rebuff had made forgetfulness impossible. Instead of greeting me again with that smile which would have been harmless if unseen, he drew away as if I had injured him. And so I had—in the shy sensitiveness of boyhood.

A peculiar twinge took me off my guard. Once upon a time I had been sensitive; many years before, in a country beyond the ocean. But I remembered. And I had been so born that no barriers of wealth or position marked me as an inferior. What must it be, then, for one in an obscure station yet having a nature perhaps even easier to impress? I felt as if I had wounded a trusting little animal. Strange, the emotion this caused.

He filled the jugs, and came towards me with the double load. I waited. Dropping his head very low, when a yard or so away he swerved to avoid striking me.

“That’s right, young man,” I said. The tone had been intended approvingly, encouragingly. But unaccustomed to such intercourse, my voice slipped to a dry undertone.

Turning his eyes up to mine, the boy flushed, jerked a familiar, naïf little nod; kept silence, ducked modestly, impulsively; and went on, the jugs swinging loosely in his hands and the little friend trotting at his heels.

Peace being made, our intercourse ceased. Several

times each day, as I sat at my window busy with books and notes and comparisons, he would go by, on his way for water or bringing it home; often he directed glances towards me, but ducked quickly before knowing if I would answer or deny.

Scarcely conscious while doing so, I would watch for him when I heard the hob-nails, or when my eyes caught a trail of blue. I would revert to my task with an annoyance not conducive to cool reflection. But there were moments when I was stirred by the idea that any one should take an interest in me.

A day came when, walking on the river-side, I suddenly found myself merging from consternation to a sense of pain in my hip and coldness about my feet. I became aware of the boy in blue knickers, looking up at me with a surprised air. He had sat down very unexpectedly on an overturned jug, but had not released another, which he held carefully upside down. At the moment of our collision, I had been looking nowhere, as I revolved my problem. Paul has since confessed that he ducked when recognising me at a distance.

He did not stupidly jump up and pretend nothing had happened. Nor did he waste energy in any sort of exclamation. Sitting unruffled on the side of one jug and holding the other as if to drain the last drop, he asked:

"Monsieur did not hurt himself?"

"No," I answered sharply, with black ungraciousness, since his sole concern had been for me. That struck me later.

He got up, very muddy in spots; one knee was blood-stained.

"It is I who have hurt you," I said.

"Oh—that was my jug. It doesn't matter." As he finished, he collapsed on the stone bench near which we had met.

"Don't be so foolish! Get off that cold stone at once!" I cried, visions of medical and legal complications flashing before me.

Slowly he drew himself together, and stood a moment on the sound leg. He glanced at the bench, then at me:

"Ah! Because the stone is cold and I am hot?—I understand. Do you think that's how I got double pleurisy, last year? I should like to tell you about it, some time. But your feet are in the water I spilled. Be careful you don't get double pleurisy."

"I shall get nothing of the kind," was my retort. "I am going home to change. You had better do the same. Can you walk?"

"I must." Trying, he found that he could.

"The jug you used as cushion is crushed flat," I said. "Give this to your mother to buy a new one." I put some money in his hand, and limped away.

"Wait, let me help you!" called the boy. "Just two minutes, to fill the jug——" He held up the sound one, pressing the other under his arm. Methodical even in emergencies, I noticed.

"Don't need any help; sorry I can't help you," was my answer. "Better have that knee attended to."

On my way home—a painful way, I confess—I soliloquised:

"Henry Aubret, you have bought freedom at the price of folly. Consider yourself fortunate though you spend three days abed. You will never again be stared at and so prompted to a childish and senile desire to stare back. The imp will avoid you religiously for the two excellent

reasons that he is mortified by his mishap, and that you have scandalously overpaid the jug."

I was right in only one respect—about spending three days abed.

When I could crawl about the house once more, I heard the bell ring insinuatingly. Aged Léonie was at her marketing. For the sake of quietude, I had only one servant. She had not warned me that a boy came daily inquiring after my health; and, expecting a parcel of books, I went to the door.

It was the boy.

My presence distinctly perturbed him. He had walked up with assurance, to make a polite inquiry and run away without obtaining the interview demanded by his mother. Assurance is easy, when you know nothing can happen. But here appeared the old man himself.

The old man, on his side, did not for one instant pretend to be pleased. If Paul had hesitated, or talked generalities, or reached any point not shaped like a pitchfork, the interview would have ended before beginning, and no relationship between us would have existed. Although positive assertions of a negative order are dangerous as well as hybrid things, I am sure of this; because I am perfectly aware of my feelings at the moment, and Paul has since confided to me that his mother had resolved to "see me herself" if I proved refractory.

"I'm to give you back half your money—mother says I must—and you are not going to have double pleurisy, are you?"

Such were his three phrases, each of which disconcerted me. To keep the money or return it might be comprehensible—but why half? And what business had any-

body's mother to interfere in the financial arrangements of a freeman whose years were more than mature? Finally, how was a body to know whether or not he might develop double pleurisy—and why double pleurisy, anyhow?

"You have disturbed me very much," I said, for the sake of saying something.

The boy dropped his head, flushed, and looked up with the bashful smile:

"I shall come back. On my way from school, at four. It doesn't matter."

The old man murmured something inarticulate.

Now, my firm intention was to issue orders that I must not be disturbed at four this day or the next, nor at any other hour of any other day, by a boy in a brown corduroy blouse and blue linen knickers. The latter, by the way, had been washed, gathering new splendour. Silence and solitude being perfect, thanks to Léonie's absence, I composed such a phrase as could not be misconstrued and should assure immunity for ever. My one safeguard against intruders, Léonie was an Alsatian who had crossed the new frontier in 1871 and taken solemn oath never to speak to another German. There were moments when her chatter made me almost envy the Germans.

She lingered beyond her custom. I could not wait indefinitely on the threshold nor in the hall; and after a while, I decided to take up my work, and to speak as she served lunch. But my orders, from much inward repetition, became concrete, and I forgot they had been spoken to none save myself.

Four o'clock rang from the church-tower, which meant we were within ten or fifteen minutes of the time, accord-

ing to the condition of the clock's works and of the sexton's rheumatism. A soft knock came at my study door, which I ignored. If Léonie had questions to ask, she knew better than to dare break upon me; if money were needed, she knew where to find it in a certain drawer—always enough to meet trifling emergencies, not more. I did not even raise my eyes, until a long pause, broken by rhythmic breathings which had nothing asthmatic about them, struck me as peculiar.

The boy stood opposite me in smiling, apologetic self-confidence.

By arguing a positive engagement and repeating our short colloquy as he believed it to have occurred, ending with a consent which ten thousand dragons could not have torn from me, he had inveigled Léonie into allowing him alone, of all Verviller, to force my barriers.

III

HE SAT down uninvited on the edge of an ottoman, murmuring, "Very well, thank you," in answer to some fancied question. His feet, in noiseless white canvas shoes—thank Heaven for that!—looked ill at ease on the thick red carpet, and his gaze wandered among profusions of books and papers.

"Mother says I am to give you back half the money—and thank you very much," he began.

I was to know later that the closing phrase had been born of his own tactfulness.

"Give back half the money? Why?" I demanded.

"Mother says so."

"How can I remember what I gave you? Why should I retain any recollection of it? Don't you know I have many things to think of?" These successive questions

were fired without allowing time for answers. If I paused after the last, it was simply because nothing further occurred to me.

The boy, serene master of himself, counted out two silver pieces and five large coppers on the edge of my desk. He could reach it by leaning over, without getting up.

"Two francs fifty—it was what mother said," he informed me. "And I want to tell you about my double pleurisy, if you're not busy. I have been thinking of what you said. I wasn't on cold stone, but my feet were."

While I sat dumb, he proceeded with his story.

Paul was preparing for his first communion, at the time, he informed me. Mother had said he must, although father had taken him away from the Brothers' when quite small.

"Is that what gave you pleurisy?" I demanded in a tone frigid enough to precipitate acute pneumonia.

"Oh, no!" He smiled wonderingly. "Did you think I meant that? I was explaining how I went to the Communal school, and still made my first communion. Mother said I should, and she said in advance, then, that I should make my renewal this year—and I did!"

He paused for me to recover. I did not recover, and he proceeded.

A stitch in the side kept him in the house, one day; then he went to school again. There was to be a catechism lesson; hot and breathless, with his head aflame and the stitch again in his side, he reached the church, and sat on a chair but his feet were on cold stone.

I suppose he expected me to brag or moralise, for he watched me earnestly. Not disconcerted by my aloofness, he continued.

Presently he felt unable to breathe, and a strange dizziness blurred thought and movement. With the one idea of reaching his mother, he got home somehow. She could not think of any appropriate medicine, so just put him to bed and told him to get a good night's sleep. Next morning he could not wake up for a while, but finally managed to dress and to get downstairs, one step at a time, holding the rail tightly with one hand and pressing the other against his side, where the stitch was, to keep from falling. (That was how he expressed it.) He could not eat, but swallowed some black coffee, which did him good.

His mother started off with him to the hospital, afoot. They had gone some distance, when he abruptly keeled over and fell down in a dead faint, there in the street. The last thing he remembered was telling himself he positively must put his foot forward once more. But what was there to do when everything went black and vanished? He believed he raised his foot, but only to step into the blackness.

Unwillingly, I had been reading through the medium of his words a simple, unquestioning faith, a strain of intuitive courage.

"I could help you to put your room in order, if you wish," he said without change of tone or manner. "I help mother."

"In order? Why, it is in order!" I protested.

Paul smiled wisely. Perhaps he had heard his mother protest so, when her work was yet to be done.

"If you would like me to come two or three times a week——"

His individual idea of logic, unembarrassed by accident or circumstance, rendered him formidable.

"Do you know what it is to write a book?" I demanded. "These papers are needed for my work."

"Oh! If you need them, I suppose you can't help it," the boy said, comfortingly. "I know somebody who makes books. His son is in my class. I went to his shop, once. It's not like yours.—He's a bookbinder. Perhaps you are a printer?"

"I write books—or I am going to write one."

"Everything is different, isn't it, because you are a stranger," he said. Having spoken, he blushed and hung his head. Because he had betrayed himself, I supposed. At all events, he went on to make a clean breast of it.

A stranger! That was what fascinated him. Here, in Verviller, lived a stranger, not from another village or province of France, but from across the seas.

Paul had learned in his geography about the country to which this stranger belonged. It was tropical, and oranges and bananas grew there wild, so a boy might pick them by the roadside; and they were bigger and sweeter than any to be bought for five or even ten centimes apiece. It was a land of lakes and rivers where one might bathe at any season—lakes as big as a whole *département*, and rivers many, many times broader and longer than the Mareille. But a boy had to be careful and splash as he bathed, to frighten away alligators. Paul had had the end of a finger nipped by a crawfish, once, so he had some idea of what an alligator bite meant. The trees in the very streets of towns as large as Verviller were alive with monkeys and parrots, which fought and screeched and made themselves generally delightful, and sometimes darted down to knock off a man's hat or pull a woman's hair. Besides, all the people were not white;

some were black, and others red, and they dressed peculiarly or went without clothes, and they had among themselves battles much worse than monkey and parrot fights.

This, and more of the same kind, came from the geography book. Easier to learn than lists of *départements* with the *préfectures* and *sous-préfectures* and *chefs-lieux*, and their populations and leading industries and natural resources.

Yet it had seemed very remote, until he heard that the old man who sat at a window in the rue du Port was born in that country, and had taken a huge steamer to reach France, and had travelled far across the ocean and not seen land for a week or more. Paul had passed through the rue du Port, and had noticed the old man; he altered his way, so as to pass often. School unfortunately lay in the opposite direction; but it was as near a road as any for going to the river. Having first dwelt in a wash-house composed principally of water, they had moved to a dwelling so dry that it had no water at all. They paid a neighbour for what had to be added to their wine; but the river was the source for household uses, and Paul the carrier.

The old man and his home were thenceforth objects for a mystery and wonderment only the more alluring because external aspects were ordinary. The house was of stone and mortar, two-storeyed, with a door and windows, like other dwellings of the rich; the old man was not very different from Frenchmen or other people. But Paul's dreams, which had wasted in fallow lands since his grandfather had no longer been there to quicken them, thrived afresh. Signs were powerless to deceive. Those rooms, seemingly innocent, must be filled with extraordinary objects; their owner must reveal his true

self in unguarded moments. Each time Paul passed, he would devise secret, reprehensible plans for getting into the house and knowing its master. Crime and larceny were alone excluded from such possibilities; they were not right, and should they displease the old man, then all chance would be forfeited. For his mad hope was that this stranger might talk like his grandfather—and tell about monkeys and parrots, too.

Acting on previous thoughts, the first day Paul saw the old man watching him, he smiled as to a friend. The old man frowned fiercely. Frightened at what he had done, Paul planned to let the old man forget; and then, by the worst of luck, they met on the tow-path, and a terribly unintelligible growl greeted him. Prudence dictated that he should avoid further encounters till many weeks had gone by. But somehow, his feet continued to seek the street. It was a habit they had fallen into, and he vainly promised himself to stop them in time—next time. He had no trouble in going about with lowered head; there was a weight to it, and to his eyes: he could not have looked up to the window.

Much of this information Paul gave me only in the sequel; on his first visit, he rested content with the salient points, which sufficed to amaze me, with retrospective remarks about the beloved grandfather in Arnan. The greatest of my surprises was the revelation of the Southern States as depicted by foreign geographers. Tropical splendours, yes; but monkeys and parrots in the streets of such a city as —— I choked out a furious correction, which elicited queries about other races than the white, and about the size of oranges and bananas picked from the tree.

“So you wanted to know me because of things like

these?" I asked, having difficulty in believing his words, or himself, or my existence, or anything else.

"Yes," he admitted, and added: "I like to know things, I went to the château, the other day. We children of the town aren't allowed in. But when the Marquis is away, strangers may visit it; I was dressed, and slipped in behind some ladies." He meant well-dressed, but I quote his words.

"I saw and learned a great deal," he continued, "and was very sad for a while after. I kept saying to myself: 'You can't ever live in a place like that! You must work all day shut up in an office like father, and live in three rooms that used to be a wash-house!' We've moved out of the wash-house, but I can't help remembering it. That night I cried in bed. And what can I do? There's only school to help me; and that will make me what father is. But thinking of you, I said to myself, 'There's a gentleman who must be very learned, and who is a stranger and must have all sorts of ideas. He could teach me even more than grandfather.'"

Fantastic—phantasmagorical! Who might he be, this child who had so commanded my thoughts, from the first time I noticed him; who now, at our first real meeting, opened his heart and appealed for guidance as if it had been his right to ask and my duty to give?

I reacted:

"Tell your mother I say the money is for you. And now leave me, I must write." My tone was kindly, while admitting of no question. But I had counted without Paul.

"Mother said I must make you keep half." Still resolute, he had grown paler. "Perhaps I had better tell you precisely what happened at home. I don't

dare take the money back, and shouldn't care to hide it. I told her you had paid for the jug, and I held out the money. She said you must take her for a fool and me for a beggar. Two francs and a half would pay for a new jug and for washing my clothes." He ducked, and smiled bashfully: "She washed the knickers herself, and the jug cost one franc ninety-five!"

I rose:

"Very well. Have it as you wish. There is one remark I would, however, make to you, young man, since you want to learn from me. A boy ought not to discuss his mother so freely with strangers."

Showing no shade of embarrassment, and as if surprised by my ignorance:

"She's not my mother!"

"Well, a stepmother——"

"She's not my stepmother. She and father just live together." This came with perfect calm. "My mother was living, so father couldn't marry. And by the time she died, they had got used to it. I don't remember my mother; I was too little. But I've heard grandfather talk about it."

"Then the grandfather you love so much is your father's father," I said, seizing upon any remark to bridge a disastrous silence.

"Oh, no! Mother's——" He turned on me wide, tragic eyes whose grey seemed to darken; he swayed slightly. Desperately, he blurted out: "He can't be my grandfather!"

I looked on, helpless and remorseful.

For some moments he did not move.

"I shall love him just the same," he said. "It doesn't matter."

Gravely he shook my hand; yet he did not go to the door. Fishing deep into his pocket, he brought forth a small black object.

"A note-book," he explained. "Almost new; I have drawn on the first page, you can tear that out. If you write down where your papers are, you won't have to waste time looking for them." He put it on the table beside the money, and held out his hand again: "Au revoir."

After a glance round the study whose confusion was undeniable, my eyes sought the boy's modest offering. It was many years since any one had thought of making me a gift.

IV

ON FINE summer afternoons I would often drive to the foot of the hill called Ripote, and leaving my trap with its driver under the trees where the road lies level, would walk up a fair incline to heights commanding a broad view. Below my favourite spot—a moss-covered rock in a natural harbour—Verviller and its part-slate, part-tile roofs rested upon the shining river like a gorgeous butterfly a-glitter on a silken thread; as the sunlight danced, I could all but see the flutter of wings about to take flight and draw up the thread that had held them.

The day was more radiant than usual, my thought more at peace with the landscape, when steps approached which I did not heed, and Paul's voice surprised me:

"You don't mind?" After an instant, he added: "I followed, because I should like to talk to you."

Months had passed, during which we had exchanged a certain number of smiles, and occasionally a few words; but he had not broken upon my solitude nor shown

obtrusive tendencies. And it was because I would not have refused him that I had respected this reserve, as free from awkwardness as from affectation. A wistful look had crept into his eyes; his features had grown more delicate, his cheeks paler.

"There was nothing else for me to do," he continued, sitting near me. "For a long time I wondered where the carriage was taking you; then I learned how you left it and walked up the hill; and once, when we were here, I found this." He drew from his pocket a small, neatly folded piece of paper on which a few notes were scribbled in my hand. "I knew you didn't want it, because you had checked off each item. That's what you did with the papers to be thrown away, in your study."

If his arrival had taken me by surprise, the knowledge which he showed of my methods astonished me. Yet displeasure overclouded other sentiments. This retreat was lost.

"So you and your mother come here?" I asked.

"No. We did come. But after finding the paper, I told mother there were snakes. I did see something very like a snake, only it was a stick. She's afraid, now. I knew you liked to be alone. You don't mind my being here to-day, though, do you—when it's necessary?"

"There was a time when you considered it possible to come to see me," I observed, baffled by so much mystery.

"Mother had told me to go."

His reply contained an element of unfrankness new to our intercourse.

"You forget, young man, that you admitted schemes for getting into my house and seeing if I wasn't a monkey trained to pick oranges in trees."

"I don't think I could have said quite that; I only

wished I might," he corrected gravely. He did not deny the charge about the monkey. "But mother said not to go again."

"And why, pray? Did she fear the savage might eat you?"

"I don't know," Paul answered. Then, with a lightening of the eyes, "No, I don't think it was that." But he did not seem sure.

He had been watching the river. With an abrupt transition, his eyes still in the distance, he said:

"I'm learning to fish. By going with father and seeing how he does it. That way, it's easy to learn."

"Was that what you came to tell me?"

"No." His tone remained very casual. "I didn't get my certificate—the government certificate for primary studies. Mother says she's going to send me to a training-ship for cabin-boys. Father doesn't say anything. But I think he will remember I'm his son. Or do you think he won't care? I shall run away, then."

Visions of Paul running away to me, scaling the garden wall to reach the back of the house while his mother battered down the front door, roused me. I became very serious:

"A boy who fails at his examination doesn't deserve anybody's interest."

"I know," he said stolidly.

"Have you any excuse?"

"They say I am stupid."

The tone conveyed no regret nor mortification.

"Perhaps only ignorant," I suggested. "How would you divide fifteen by six?"

For a moment he stared wildly, seeking counsel from the distant town, from the near-by trees; twice at the

verge of surrender, he resolved upon another effort. His face cleared, his eyes shone:

"How I should divide fifteen by six? Why, with my arithmetic!"

"If you were to go to school another year, and use your wits, you would pass," I said.

"No." He turned a strange hue; his voice was scarcely a breath: "That was what they wanted. But it's no use. I won't work like my father."

"Aren't you rather young to decide? Discouragement is natural now, but——"

Paul had become so very pale, his lips were so startlingly colourless and his lashes drooped so heavy and nerveless, that I stopped.

"I failed on purpose," he whispered with a tinge of despairing sullenness. "If they make me go back, I shall fail on purpose once more. There's nothing else for me to do."

"And what will you gain?"

"I shall work, but not like him."

"They will send you to the training-ship."

His head hung very low, but his voice gained strength;

"I would rather be killed than kill poor people."

"You don't mean——"

Then the story came.

Some months before, his grandfather had visited them. Paul still loved him just the same, and didn't betray the fact that he knew of their lost relationship. But things weren't as in Arnan. Grandfather, who had been so very wise, was less interesting, somehow; and he slept downstairs, so there could be no listening at night. A pity, wasn't it? For so many things would have been easier to understand.

That visit had served as pretext for various merry parties.

"If you are not quick, we shall leave you," his mother called from below, one day. "Who ever saw such a slow, lazy boy?"

By "we" she meant not only grandfather but also the black and white spaniel, Diane. Her strongest affection seemed to be for Diane. Once she had walked eight miles across country because a railway ticket had been refused the dog. "And she did right," Paul paid the generous tribute. "Diane is like a child and cries when left at home."

From his room, Paul answered half-heartedly: "I'm coming." Still he did not hurry. His mother had forbidden him to wear the brown corduroy blouse or the blue knickers. He must put on his good clothes, a new suit of salt-peppery drill with an exceedingly baggy coat and trousers wrinkling down to his calves, and a cotton shirt though he had no clean collar and must go with a bone stud at his throat. Also, he was commanded to renounce white canvas shoes for the sake of heavy boots. His mother wished him to be "dressed." He repeated the word, not realising how nice-looking, how charming he was in the brown and blue, and how graceful were his movements in those light shoes; not suspecting that he became a workingman's son, with only his delicate features and scrupulous cleanliness to retrieve him from commonness, when clad and shod according to his mother's idea of fashion. So he dressed as told to do; but it went slowly.

Only a dim idea of what awaited him had been hinted. He had often heard his father allude to such things; his mother, when she listened, would say with indifference:

"People ought to learn to manage!" He would shudder, not knowing why. By going to-day, he would know; but he was afraid.

Diane led the procession, mother and grandfather coming next. Paul followed some yards behind, tying boot-laces, losing his hat, or inventing other means for gaining time whenever they stopped and called him. His father, to maintain administrative dignity, had gone on from the office, alone.

They passed through the town, and reached the outskirts. Not the pleasant, open-aired suburb overhanging the river, where there were big, beautiful cottages built of brick and stone, or of wood painted several different hues, with jagged roofs and windows at unexpected places. A dingy suburb off towards the plain,—remote, forsaken, sparsely scattered.

The last house was what they sought. Beyond lay the little settlement of outcasts living with many children in damaged railway freight vans taken off their wheels—one van for each family. Where the clumsy sliding door was drawn back, a rough wooden partition might be seen, making a two-roomed "home"; round it ran a small space, rubbish-filled, perhaps called "garden." The boys and girls who lived there were careless in speech and ways and person; bare, dirty skin showed under the rags, their hair rambled in unexplored thickets; their talk, when perchance overheard, savoured of midnight prowls.

Though Paul had never seen, or at all events noticed, the house, he knew its occupant. Everybody called her Mère Rollinet, and said she was mad. Entirely harmless, her eccentricity consisted in going her own way, muttering to herself. A delusion haunted her, that her only son, killed in 1870, was still alive and would come back at what

she called "the end of the war." She did not often talk of him; perhaps she had been offended by joking questions, or else was slowly forgetting. The idea seemed to gain strength when she saw young soldiers pass, each autumn, after their conscription; the smooth faces, the untrained gait, the ill-fitting garments swung upon strong young bodies and long loose limbs, would rouse her intelligence as if a familiar voice had shouted in her ear; she would start, peer into the ranks, try to identify the boys one by one; then would reel back with a low wail, before rushing on once more, muttering, muttering the eternal complaint which none ever grasped—not even herself, poor soul.

Mère Rollinet's trade was mattress-making; she could do only a few hours' work each day, going from house to house. Not enough to live on, much less pay rent and taxes. Yet she must have a home for her son. The landlord had shown mercy, and she had provided for the taxes. Then her strength failed steadily, and she could pay nothing. Charity came to her assistance; but she took to drink, and was struck off the rolls of the deserving poor.

It was a miserable two-roomed hut, with a leaky roof, an unsound door, and a window which looked as if it could not be opened. Voices were heard within; Mère Rollinet's, always in the same whining tone, and Paul's father's, arguing. Her voice stayed in one place; his increased and dwindled as he came and went. Sometimes both were lost in a noise of heavy, rough-shod steps.

The door opened wide. A large bundle of clothes flew out, and bounced down to the rickety gate. The old woman, her congested face aflame, her scant yellowed hair a-bristle, flew after, shrieking.

Men brought the furniture into the street. Two broken

chairs. A trunk battered out of shape. A doorless armoire with carved oaken cornice. Some rusted cooking utensils, an uncleaned pot, an old stove with a pipe like a sieve. A few unaccountable objects, including a pair of mantel ornaments.

Perhaps Mère Rollinet was moving. But why the crowd, the fuss, the curiosity? Paul had watched people move, at appropriate seasons; this was not the season, nor yet the way.

The furniture was stacked in a hand-cart and trundled off. Mère Rollinet did not follow, but threw herself across the bundle of clothes, sobbing softly, trying to speak and unable to utter a sound. Paul's father came; he and the crowd moved away. Only Paul and the group of coarse boys lingered.

Whether that her wild grief had spent itself, or that the clearing stage brought relief, the old woman began to articulate words which she had been murmuring. Paul heard them distinctly:

"Cast out in the offal—*jetée dans le déchet !*"

His mother, with the crowd, had gone to an open space not far off; Diane insanely leaped and barked about. Mère Rollinet dragged her bundle out to the street, put it against the fence of her last home, and sat there, forlornly propped. One of the coarse boys had been gnawing a large, hard crust; he flung it on her knees, crying:

"There, take that, *la mère !*"

Her furniture was being sold. Paul knew at last what it all meant. A seizure for taxes—part of the day's work for his father. His mother bought for half a franc the mantel ornaments, little statues looking like lead which were found to be bronze. Between the chatter of the seller, the tramping of men, the comments of women,

Mère Rollinet's wail would come, rising to a thin screech and falling to a hoarse moan:

"Cast out in the offal—*jetée dans le déchet!*"

Paul went home, and got his books, to study at the kitchen table. His eyes, large and fixed, glowed as by their own intense light while the rays of the lamp shone full into them.

"*Eh, toi!*" his mother scolded shrilly. "Will you mind your business and learn that lesson? Your laziness will yet make you fail at the examinations!"

"If you don't get your certificate you can't enter the government service," his father admonished contentedly.

Paul had gone so far, with steadily growing but still controlled emotion, not attempting to do more than sketch external aspects which had stamped themselves vividly, cruelly on his mind. As he paused and looked up at me, he seemed to sound my sentiments before continuing. His face was very white and drawn:

"All at once, I knew what I should be expected to do. I knew I couldn't. And I'm only a boy, not big enough to argue. There was only one thing for me. If I failed to get my school certificate, they couldn't—they couldn't ever make me——"

His head fell forward on his knees, and he broke into a passion of weeping.

V

I did not move nor speak. Yet perhaps I turned my head slightly aside. For my cheeks, too, were moist.

His tears did not last long. With his forehead pressed against the arms he had folded across his upraised knees, he sat quite still. What I saw most clearly of him was the desolate curve of the back and the drooping head

with its velvet-like, well-planted hair, and the neck, firm, clean-cut, resolute in the midst of this abandonment, a column of faith unshaken by the storm. I don't think that the possible significance of a neck had ever until then been borne in upon me. His testified that though the heart might be bruised and the mind bewildered, a reserve of control lay between the two and would say the final word.

After an impassive silence he sighed deeply, and looked up—not towards me, but at the landscape. I spoke:

"Paul, I can't discuss with you the principle of this."

"I had hoped you would," he said, very low.

"There are some things I may point out," I went on evasively. "Provided you will answer a few questions."

"Anything. You know how to understand."

His decision had been taken six months before, I learned. Then he had to seek means for living up to it. Failure at the last minute would have meant only severe punishment, because he would have had no excuse; and perhaps he might have lacked the courage to fail a second time. But let him be really so ignorant that he was acknowledged in advance to stand barely a chance, and everything would seem natural.

At home, there were continual scenes about his slighted work. Since he did not like untruth, he could only seek protection in silence.

"When mother has taken hold of an idea, she's never the first to let go," he commented.

"If she had had a son of her own, I wonder if he would have inherited the trait?" I asked.

The ghost of the wondering smile flashed in his eyes and parted his lips for a second. He grew solemn again, but the atmosphere was relieved.

Adopting a policy of trifling, he had played on any pretext. It came naturally, once you got used to it, he informed me. A fly on the window-pane proved an exceedingly interesting object, when one had grammar to learn.

The weekly school reports reflected his attitude. Conduct always "médiocre," work never more than "passable," attention usually "déplorable." His mother herself ended by admitting it to be hopeless; though she surprised him by saying to a neighbour that in other respects he was a good boy.

Incredible as the entire situation appeared, his tone and manner, added to recollections of my previous experience with him, brought conviction. But I stopped him with a question. Looking six months ahead in those schemes to forfeit his certificate——

Not six whole months, he corrected me. He had not been clever enough to think it all out at once. For some time he had only drifted, seeing the end and not knowing how to reach it.

Well, say several months, I resumed. Plotting systematically, looking ahead towards the certificate he had resolved not to get,—had he thought of seeing beyond? Had he reflected that some sort of an education was needed for any career?

Why—that was precisely the point! Paul replied, puzzled by my denseness. He knew the projects for him. A commercial course when he had got his primary certificate; then an office position, preferably in a bank, while waiting to enter the tax service with his father. That would not be living, would it? He wanted to do something, no matter what; to *do* something.

Unwilling to answer, I bade him go on.

Making bicycles was doing something; they were useful. He had a friend who could help him, the son of the very M. Lavenu from whom I got my carriage. They had been to school together, years before, at the Brothers'; and had separated, and forgotten each other, and met again recently. Paul did not play with him. Marcel Lavenu was a bad boy, but willing to help.

I confess to having wondered whether a great principle had as much to do with Paul's heroic decision, as a wish to tinker at bicycles with the rediscovered friend who was a "bad boy" but "willing to help." For a youth who persistently neglects his lessons, and cultivates sympathies for flies on window-panes, and admits a weakness for rural life, the prospect of riding his employer's bicycles must have charms.

"What shall I do?" he asked.

By way of reply, I observed that he could never aspire to be more than a workman, if he fulfilled his present intentions.

This startled him. Not the idea, but the fact I should raise it as an objection. He was quite willing, he assured me. A workman earned his own money, and earned it by making things. Not at all like being in a shop or an office. The difference was that a workman made things, and didn't just handle what other people had produced, clearing a penny here and there.

I don't know where he got that notion of the importance of "making things." He could not explain it to me then nor later; he merely kept repeating it more emphatically in the face of my questions. This boy of thirteen saw into the future and read the conflict which must succeed clashes of capital and labour or of class and mass: the struggle of the world's creators of all thoughts and all

objects whatsoever, against the united powers of the unproductive.

"Father is better than a workman," Paul went on. "I've heard him tell mother he had relatives in Brittany, well-bred people who wouldn't have anything to do with him because of her. But that doesn't keep us from being what we are, just as father's education only taught him to drive out poor people from their homes. If they would let me tell them—if they would——" His voice broke; his lashes fell, and he looked quickly away.

"There's just the possibility they might listen to me; do you want me to try?" I asked. "But there's no hurry about it; and meanwhile I'll make a bargain with you. It's all very well for you to begin as a workman, provided you have the prospect of advancing. Do you think you can do that, learning to speak and to think like apprentices and cyclists, and closing all the chambers of your mind except those you need for manual purposes? I promise to help you in your own choice of a career, if you will promise to go back to school and try hard for the certificate next year. Meanwhile, would you like to come and help put my papers in order, as you once suggested?"

Paul sprang up, and seized my hand in both of his.

The sun set, darting fire-rays through swaying trees which seemed to shrink from the scorching touch. In the plain, Verviller, robbed of butterfly glory, brooded dull like a grey moth impaled upon a wire of shining steel. Lights that glimmered one by one, and formed sudden tiny clusters, would lend for an instant to its wings a faint semblance of stirring in the evening breeze. But the movement was short, convulsed, followed by the stillness of slow-creeping death.

For more than an hour I had been alone on the hill-top, revolving in mind the bargain made. I could see Paul through the gathering dusk as if he had yet been beside me—his head bowed over the arms he had crossed on his upraised knees. I was asking myself if I had regrets. And I thank God humbly when I remember that there was in me no shadow of turning. A word had ended my life of peaceful isolation. But without that word I should have been for myself an object of secret reproach.

I pass over the scene which Léonie made me for staying out so late and risking chills. But next morning our talk was to the purpose.

"Léonie," I said, "the work here must be getting rather hard. I intend to get somebody to help you—in my study."

That was the awkward detail. My study! Never did I allow Léonie to have her own way there.

Her small, parchment-hued, much-wrinkled face, with its silvery hair smooth under the starched and frilled cap,—the whole admirably in keeping with her trim little figure and grey dress and spotless apron,—gave her an appearance of mildness. But I knew how to read her steady eyes and her square jaw which often grew squarer.

"You may think you need help rather in the kitchen," I ventured.

"My kitchen!" she snorted. "I should throw out of doors, by the two shoulders, any wench who came to disturb me! Help elsewhere, if you will—but never in my kitchen. It would do more good for the front steps than for your study—they, at least, can be kept tidy."

"Quite so," I hastily assented. "As things are at present, you are perfectly right. But things must change,

Léonie. I have developed a distaste for confusion. My papers must be sorted, and kept in order. Therefore I intend to take a little assistant—a sort of junior secretary.”

She merely sniffed and grunted.

“Is there anybody you could suggest? I know so few people in Verviller.” The hope she would mention Paul was faint, but worth trying; and she would be flattered.

“So long as it’s not the Clermont boy, it’s of no consequence,” was my reward from Léonie.

“Young Clermont? Just the thing,” I said. “Find out the address, can you?”

“Address?” came her scornful query. “What do you want with that? The woman has brought herself, and him with her. They were downstairs when I came up to tell you, and they are waiting now, unless they have made off with my pails and brooms.”

Really, Léonie was too rough. Respect ought to have suggested that my silver spoons would be the prey. But there was no changing her.

“Why did you not tell me?” I demanded.

“As if I hadn’t—first thing on entering! When I came into the room, I said—and they are my very words—‘The boy Clermont and his mother, whom Monsieur sent for, are downstairs!’ Monsieur grows more forgetful each day.”

“Show them up,” I ordered.

For a wonder, she went without demur. Doubtless she suspected that I should call her back:

“No! I shall see them in the dining-room.”

Paul’s self-styled mother received me airily, almost breezily:

"So this boy had been worrying you! Not a bad boy, if he weren't so hard-headed—and clumsy. I scolded him for knocking you with that jug. What has he done this time? He said you wanted to speak to me."

The boy had done no wrong, I assured her. I needed his help during the holidays, say three times a week, and would pay him, of course.

By all means, she said; money didn't matter; glad to be rid of him. If he bothered her much more, she would be rid of him entirely. In fact, she had almost made up her mind to send him to the *École des mousses*—

Paul stood between us with bowed head. There was no humiliation about his pose; only patient waiting with an inward note of confidence, a pose which for grace as well as eloquence might have inspired a classical sculptor. She shot a swift glance to make sure his eyes were lowered; and then winked at me. Yes, this amazing woman positively winked at me over the boy's head, there in my own dining-room.

"But an ignorant lad would be of no use here," I said. "Unless it is agreed that he goes back to school next year, and unless he promises to study his very best for that certificate——"

"More than anybody could make him do," said the woman. "Only yesterday morning——"

Paul looked up:

"I promise now."

"There! I knew I'd get it out of him sooner or later," she went on. "I always have my way. Do you know, when I was a girl, and not ugly, the boys used to tell me, they were so impudent——"

"It's understood, then," I cut her short. "Good-day, Madame Clermont. Paul, au revoir."

Often, since, I have wondered if this was the true cause of some of the events which followed.

As Paul left the room, he sent me a look heavy with doubt and with pain. He was thinking that the chances were she would not again allow him to cross my threshold—and he was pledged to study.

VI

THE woman swept the boy away and hurried him home, not speaking. To keep beyond her reach and avert irreparable words, he announced that water was needed—much water. For a couple of hours he trotted to the river-side and back, until every jug, jar, and tub was filled, and some twice over, when they could be emptied without fear of detection. At last she fell asleep in a chair.

He tiptoed out and ran to the tobacco-shop, where he fumbled nervously at the picture post-card table.

"I don't find what I want," he felt constrained to remark, seeing much attention centred upon him. As a rule, his errands were for his father.

"When one doesn't want anything in particular it takes more than a day to find," came the caustic reply. "But if you did want something, and asked for it, I could give satisfaction. Mine is the most complete collection in town."

"I want a landscape," he said irresolutely. "A hilly landscape, with trees."

"Here are views of the Vosges. If you don't like them, you are hard to please."

"Couldn't—couldn't it be something nearer to Verviller?"

"Not unless you will be content with the Ripote."

An unopened package was laid before him. His heart beat like the whirl of a bicycle wheel. But he controlled his emotion, and said carelessly:

"That might do."

With trembling fingers he took the cards one by one. There! The very view he wanted, and in colours. Artistic and most beautiful, with a bright blue sky and brilliant green trees and smudgy brown streaks for trunks and rocks and other things. The identical spot where he had sat the evening before could be guessed, if not exactly recognised. It cost ten centimes, and the stamp, ten more; his entire fortune having consisted of twenty-five centimes, he went out with only one *sou* remaining to him in all the world. But he would not be driven to run away from the training-ship, if he managed this affair properly.

Next, he must write the card at home, slip out to the letter-box, and get back again before mother woke. The risk would have been slighter if he had gone straight to the post-office and written there. But nothing so delicate and complicated could be attempted in public.

On the table which supported his mother's arms and head, he wrote:

"Quant viendrè-je vous voir. Votre petite ami, Paul."

The penmanship was excellent, but the spelling excited his particular admiration. Only the question of a signature worried him. He had neglected to leave a place for his family name in front of the Christian name, as in school lists and birth-certificates. So he made a new line "Clermont, Paul." Considerable space still yawned at the bottom of the card, where a sketch would look very well. An artistic group consisting of a pen, an ink-pot, and what might have been a note-book, presently materialised.

When he returned the second time, his mother had not yet roused. Contentedly, he sat far back with eyes turned to the window; one foot caught under him, the other swinging slowly, easily; his fancies in that mysterious house where oranges and bananas ought to grow, and monkeys and heathen should rage, though they did not.

She woke at last. The morning's episode seemed forgotten. Complaining of a headache attributed to sultry weather, she told him they would go to the woods, to get some air. Incidentally, that air was never admitted within doors; house-windows must be kept hermetically sealed for purposes of health. If questioned, she could only answer that "fevers" came from leaving windows open, especially at night. She might have been surprised to learn that her ideas were traditions handed down since mediæval days when neither drains, sewers, garbage-cans, nor public hygiene existed; and that, the foulness of streets having gradually disappeared, the air of towns was no longer necessarily poisonous.

The fields with mellowing crops lay on either hand along the road. Reaching the trees at the foot of the steep incline, her fatigue grew so great that she settled down on some fallen leaves, and produced her knitting. It looked very like the piece she had in Arnan, and not much bigger; it had been gently moth-eaten at one corner.

Paul got up and crept to the road-side.

A cloud of dust began to approach from town; the carriage came on, swept past. For a moment or two he stood rooted, with parted lips. Then he saw a slight figure disentangle itself from the dust-cloud, which increased to a species of whirl. Marcel Lavenu sprang at him.

"What are you doing, waiting there like a head on a post?" Marcel demanded.

"Hush—mother's sleeping!" Paul warned.

"So is my grandmother. Are you sleeping, too? You look like it—and a nightmare, at that!"

"It's I who shall be scolded, if you wake her."

"Well, then you scold her! Let's catch up with that old rattle-trap, and steal a ride, both of us. Quick, we can do it, she's slowed down."

"You do, if you wish." Paul hesitated, and asked: "Was M. Aubret inside with you?"

"No, nor inside with himself." Marcel rounded his eyes solemnly. "Got the glanders, to-day."

"What?"

"Cold in the head, you sort of stupid! Or perhaps only a chill in his toes. Nobody over there but the driver, who's off on an errand. I was stealing a ride."

"In your father's carriage?"

"No, under it. I can get inside any day, that's no fun. But I wanted to steal a ride; and I played motor-car. It's to-morrow I begin work at the bicycle-box. You coming with me? Did you get your certificate? I did."

Paul smiled the bashful smile. If Marcel Lavenu had passed, then anybody could.

"You failed?" Marcel went on. "That's what you get for leaving the Brothers' school.—Now, for the last time, *are* you coming? She's at a walk, we can still do it. All right, go back to sleep, then—and you'd better go back to Frère Alexandre next winter!"

With which he piped up shrilly:

*"Trois petits prêtres
Sortant du paradis,
Avec la bouche pleine
Jusqu'à demain midi——"*

"Oh, *don't* wake mother!" Paul pleaded.

Marcel laughed, made a face like an overfed squirrel, spat more or less a distance of a yard and two inches, wiped his chin on his sleeve, and raced off in the wake of his equipage, singing louder than before:

*"Clarinette, clarinette,
Mes souliers ont des lunettes,
Pomme, poire, abricot,
Il y en a dans le pot,
Dans la cuiller à pot——"*

He whirled abruptly, stopped with one foot extended, looked back, put his hands trumpet-fashion, and ended the refrain in a mad yell before speeding on once more:

"Nu-mé-ro Zé—Ro!"

Rather personal, perhaps. But Marcel was unusual and delightful. Paul envied him generously.

So there was nothing to be done. An answer to the card would come or not. Perhaps to-night, perhaps to-morrow morning. One way or the other, matters would probably be sealed when his father reached home. If it all seemed vague—if mother remembered her anger——

Taking some paper and a pencil from his pocket, he sat down under a tree, using his knee as desk, and practised drawing books until he did one conspicuously unlike either a box or a house. He had not been pleased with the note-book sketched on the post-card.

His father came home very tired and irritable. Dinner was eaten in dull silence. The master of the establishment took out his pipe and pouch, and the morning paper.

"Paul!" he said.

That sufficed, added to a half-franc. Within five minutes, Paul was running in again with eyes a-sparkle from the briskness of his gait and the boldness of a sudden determination. He would broach the subject himself.

"I say he shall not go," he heard his mother declare in her final accent.

Taking the little square blue package of *caporal ordinaire*, Clermont filled his pipe, struck a match, slowly puffed at the flare, and smoked. As he put the newspaper in position, an edge knocked his glasses crooked; he read on, not seeming aware of this, nor of the miniature lamp reflected in each lens.

One thing, at least, stood out clearly in the midst of Paul's desolation. If he had to run away now, only a solitary *sou* remained to him.

A distant knocking sounded through the quiet room. The postman. What good would that do? Paul got up in a sort of trance, made for the window by mistake, collided with the stove, and finally reached the hall. At one end were the stairs leading up to his room, and the door of his parents' room; at the other was the street entrance. He turned to the left, as if going to bed, when a second series of knocks recalled him.

He went to the door and opened it. The night was very dark.

"Does M. Clermont live here?" asked the voice of which he had been thinking. "Oh! It's Paul, isn't it? Will you tell your father I should like to speak to him?—You had better ask."

For Paul already led the way. He felt that if his friend were left for so much as a moment, there could be no meeting again.

"Father is at home. I know he can see you," the boy

said. "Come in, please. I'm forbidden to leave the door open at night."

Oh, Paul, Paul! And yet, this was an assertion of fact.

M. Aubret entered the kitchen, announced thus:

"Father! It's *the gentleman!*"

The mother was sitting deep down in a chair, her plump arms folded, her broad shoulders rounded, her head bent forward with brow lowering under the shock of yellowish hair. The father, a frail, debilitated, thin-haired man, had eyes which were blue and straightforward when he raised them; his nose and chin indicated weakness. There would have been no trace of commonness in all this, had he not let his moustache trail shaggily over his mouth. Unquestionably, as his son had intimated, he was politely born; of his own docile will he had glided down that plane which gives immunity from barriers.

During a brief pause, M. Aubret observed them, and also this room where they cooked, ate, and lived, in workman taste, whereas the house allowed of the courtesies of existence. Its most conspicuous aspect was tidiness. The furniture was principally of the showy, dear-at-a-cheap-price style; but a tall, old-fashioned desk with wrought brass mountings had been placed against the wall, far from dangerous contact with the stove's heat.

On the mantel were two statuettes of XVIIIth Century bronze; those Paul had mentioned as coming from the sale of old Mère Rollinet. In Paris, they would have yielded gold.

The woman did not move. The man took his pipe, put it on the newspaper, removed his glasses, laid them carefully to one side, and got up.

"I have made an offer to your son," M. Aubret said. "Your wife has probably told you the details on which

we agreed. But I wished for your confirmation, as the boy's father."

No one spoke. M. Aubret caught Paul's eye, and read tragedy there. The boy was colourless, with drooping lashes and quivering lids; his lithe, graceful form rested limply against the door. An instant's animation came as he looked up, just once; then he fell back into the desolate, unresisting pose.

"I also wished to tell you," M. Aubret resumed, speaking more slowly, "that I shall see what can be done for him at school, next winter."

The atmosphere was less tense, but no acknowledgment came in words.

"Three times a week, for an hour, to help me with the papers in my study; I shall pay five francs a week," M. Aubret added. "You surely cannot complain of such terms?"

Clermont's amazement showed that he had not been enlightened about the financial arrangements:

"Why, Monsieur, you are too liberal! Certainly, the boy is at your orders."

"I shall expect you to-morrow at three, Paul," M. Aubret said. "Good-night."

Paul followed him out in silence, closed the door very quietly, and came back not daring to breathe. He knew it was not yet finished. But his mother's explosion, begun during his short absence, was never destined to reach its end.

"And I say you shall hold your tongue!" the man roared, bringing his fist down on the table with a crash. The dog woke up and growled; a dish on a shelf slipped flat without breaking. "Paul, you shall go to that gentleman's to-morrow. And now, to bed!" He waited for

the boy to bolt out of the room. Then he cried: "It is *my* son, name of a name!"

Wonderful! Father had never before defied mother—nor defended him by right of fatherhood.

Late into the night, Paul lay wide awake, thinking. He had reached that age of ages when a boy begins to discover himself—and fancies he has discovered the world.

VII

NO QUESTION as to what he should do there occurred to Paul. Suffice it that wonderful things must happen.

He was expected to sort many papers of different sizes, but looking much alike unless he puzzled over the first letter of a word written at the top. No variety about this, especially with words in a tongue he could not read. Still, he went home fairly pleased.

I found him most cheerfully, most delightfully inefficient. If I say "delightfully," it is for two reasons. First, there is a certain pleasure about any definite conclusion in this world of uncertainties and half-measures. Secondly, the charm which never abandoned him increased whenever he blundered hopelessly.

His punctuality, at least, left nothing to be desired, the first week. Then he arrived half an hour late, explaining that his mother had needed him for an errand. In atonement, he came an hour too soon for the subsequent appointment; it appeared his mother would need him shortly after three. By way of irregularity, this was doing rather well. But he soon surpassed it. He not only missed an entire afternoon, but turned up on the morrow, when I did not expect him. Punctually at what would have been the right time, he entered smiling, half-bashful, and entirely confident.

"I arranged to come to-day," he said. "It doesn't matter."

I own to having been disconcerted. There he stood in his blue knickers and brown blouse and white shoes (the first and second worn by polite request, and the last by strict injunction), smiling more faintly than ever before, his head with the velvety sheen ducked very low, while he darted up at me his wide, trusting eyes. If he had said, once again, that his mother had needed him, I should have been pacified. But to have the opinion volunteered that it "didn't matter" . . .

My words would possibly not have been so harsh as my thought. But before they came, recollection checked me. He reserved that formula for things very grave, very painful, beyond his power to hinder or amend, and against which he must steel himself as best he might.

"Did your mother need you?" I asked.

He looked down.

"She said I was to come to-day." The voice was so faint it barely reached me.

So that was it. She said he was to come to-day! He could not honestly claim that she had needed him. She said he was to come to-day.

Useless to distress the boy with remonstrances. That night, I wrote to his father.

Paul disappeared for four days, but eventually turned up, at an odd moment, serene as if such behaviour were normal. He brought me a little bunch of flowers gathered in the woods, and offered no explanations. Nor did I ask for any.

Reading in his eyes more than in his words, I knew that Paul depended on me; and that I must not allow my utility to diminish. But he had become an important factor in my life. Devoting my final years to an abstract work,

possessing no human ties of affection and having to go back a lifetime before I found personal ground for memory, I had come to look upon Paul's hours with me as eventful. I knew the responsibility I had assumed towards him; I knew that so long as he proved willing, I must abide by my part of our bargain; but I knew that this was the least potent of the forces driving me. Paul had made his way into an old heart that had thought itself dried and withered, all but crumbling to dust. An early experience in that far-away country, which he and I loved for reasons so different, had left me only sadness and bitterness for many years; and when these passed, the vigour of my heart went with them so completely that it could no longer even suffer. Now, I had been roused to take personal interest in this strange, neglected waif who had grown a rare flower among weeds, unconscious of strength or beauty or merit, who had developed just because development is the natural, healthy law.

He and I must henceforth come together more completely, or we should drift apart. By degrees, Paul's work with me had metamorphosed into my talks with Paul—while the stipend paid him had continued. What I proposed was an honest, radical transformation. I was to help him learn how to study. "Since it will increase your future utility here, it will be worth my while to do this and still pay for your time," I asserted. He blushed, and smiled.

Though having less conception of method than I should have thought possible, he studied with a will. Habits of carelessness were so effectively ingrained that he could not be careful. As for spelling, he still strongly reflected the education of the rustic grandfather. But he would never get distressed nor disheartened.

Accidents had continued, of course. He would still

turn up at wrong hours or on wrong days, as commanded by the spurious stepmother. At times he would tramp in with his horrible hob-nailed boots, having been "unable to find" the canvas shoes; the ill-fitting, common pepper-and-salt suit, worn with a collarless shirt, replaced the blue knickers and brown corduroy blouse. My protests being vain, I did not insist—for his sake.

His father, at all events, seemed to appreciate my efforts and to note good results. We met in the street; Clermont said he wanted to thank me for what he termed his son's regeneration.

"The boy is studying," he said impressively; and added in a contemplative voice: "It's odd, he never will do anything for us. There's certainly something wrong about that child."

Was there?

Paul, who stood beside his father, shot me one of his olden looks, but more intense, more devoted. That look reassured me—against the questions already arising within me. Transformations are so rare, unless a being is truer than gold and clearer than crystal!

Throughout the winter and early spring, we worked happily and uneventfully, with sufficient regularity; I added English to his school tasks. The annual fair was to come, filling the tree-shaded Avenue de la République with commotion and dust-storms, and the shrieks of whistles and steam pianos. I thought of profiting by my martyrdom, on such occasions, to reward Paul's zeal.

"Find out what afternoon there will be the greatest possible number of performances in all the side-shows, and I shall take you to everything," I said. "Only let me know, as there is one day I cannot be free."

Paul came back with sparkling eyes and brilliant red lips parted in his broadest smile. Thursday afternoon, please!

"But that is when I must go to my bank."

A gasp; a sudden paleness under the flush in his cheeks. Then a deeper flush than before. With unflinching look, though with a voice which could not remain steady, he said:

"That's all right. It doesn't matter."

I felt an unutterable wretch.

"All things considered, I would rather break an engagement than a promise," I said. "We shall go."

There was nothing he could say. But his eyes devoured me.

"May I ask for one thing?" I went on. "I have a weakness for your brown and blue. If that suit still exists, it would make me happy to see you wear it."

"Oh, certainly! Those are the clothes I like best. I shall tell mother," he declared confidently.

Now that so much has been made clear, it is needless to describe the garb in which he presented himself. Sometimes I have doubted if it could have been his. It looked borrowed for the occasion from a floor-scrubber. But the sight of his happy face beside me throughout the afternoon sufficed for recompense.

The next day, he was to come for a lesson. When he appeared once more in that unspeakable suit, he was not my guest, and no promise bound me. Great as my regard for him might be, and much as I had already passed over, I knew that if his stepmother wished to find how far I would bear provocation, I must draw a line. I told him to go home and change his clothes. He went—and there was no return.

A week later I saw Paul, in the street, with his school-books. He glided swiftly round a corner, hoping I should not see him.

If my heart grew heavy, there was yet a strain of rejoicing in my household. Léonie had attributed to this connection every domestic mishap, from an attack of my gout to difficulties in keeping her copper saucepans bright.

"That woman is a witch," she said. "If the boy had got a firm footing in the house, terrible things would have followed. I know, from my own experience in Alsace, where Germans swarmed in—and she is surely a German, for all the French ways she tries to imitate, and can't. She is capable of working the wizards on Monsieur. Already she has vowed vengeance against him. It seems Monsieur tried to interfere with the way she dressed her husband's son. And Monsieur was working the boy to death, giving him drudgery beyond his years, and paying only five francs a week for services which a man would have demanded twenty francs for. So she says. Evil will yet come of it. I shall put the scissors to the window, so none of these people may ever cross the threshold again—rusty scissors with one point broken accidentally; a sure protection, if one knows how to do it. And she has also turned the boy's father against Monsieur, this time. An ugly story is told in town, about the way Monsieur tried to be gallant with her when she brought the boy here first. If the man were as violent as he is jealous——"

"That will do, Léonie. Go to your work!" I exploded with a fury which must have been interpreted as proof of guilt.

Again I saw Paul turn away to avoid me; but if my

heart was not gay, it was at least less heavy. Going to my little garden when I reached home, my attention was drawn to Léonie's scissors fastened to the blinds. They caused me a peculiar twinge—a prophecy and a reminder.

During the half-year which followed, I met Paul once, as a bicycle apprentice, behaving in a very rowdy way, with a cigarette stump between his lips, calling out impudent remarks to passers-by and singing snatches from a not very nice refrain. On his swaggering course he came so near to me that he roughly brushed me with his elbow—purposely, but having no idea whom he assaulted. He felt very clever and devilish, doing that sort of thing, he has since confessed.

At the beginning of summer, Paul hurled at his parents the bomb of independence, declaring that in virtue of his fourteen years he would study no longer, and intended to enter a bicycle shop. He was met by a counter-blast, but won his position thanks to an attitude of quiet, dogged, unargumentative determination. The prospect of a second failure at school had been too much for him; though his decision about his future remained unaltered, fourteen years bring their degree of pride among other burdens. Only the promise made to me had held him back for so long; but he had finally decided that, my part of the bargain no longer being held, he might be freed from his. And, while becoming an apprentice at Delligny's, he was not ignorant, as when he and I had discussed this problem.

The boys worked very much to themselves, in a large shed next to the shop; and Marcel Lavenue was the acknowledged leader. Paul retained the same affection for this friend of his childhood, while perhaps admiring

him less. Marcel had a way of demanding attention at any price and of slipping readily through difficulties, which could not find sympathy in a nature such as Paul's. Yet no action of Marcel's ever seemed grave or failed to be amusing; and his position as introducer and protector made opposition impossible. Paul had no desire to form an opposition; and presently found he could adapt himself to the ways about him. He did not care to dwell on these experiences, when looking back on that period; though to his credit be it said that he told me the whole story, with a frankness which was a solid guarantee for the future.

The end came when disaster overtook the junior personnel of the establishment. Some things had been stolen. Inquiries revealed deep and systematic corruption. The chief culprit, one André Manadan, a puny, rheumatic, greenish-faced little apprentice with weak knees and shifty eyes, was ignominiously ejected at a moment's notice, together with others gravely compromised. But M. Delligny, tall, lean, with a chicken-neck and a depressed stomach, the sort of man who is for ever apprehending ruin and often attains it in consequence, did not stop there. Marcel Lavenue, as a senior apprentice enjoying much prestige and signal privileges, and furthermore a clever, experienced little workman, was spared because he would be useful breaking in new boys. Paul, who had enjoyed himself too much to learn the trade he claimed, was dismissed on general principles as a superfluity who could serve only to hand down heinous practices.

Before going home, Paul walked on the river-bank. Matters would be less distressing if he formed some project. The training-ship had ceased to give him concern;

the forfeited certificate delivered him from a tax office. But the next choice he made must be his trade for life. And his parents would be capable, after his present fiasco, of articling him to a grocery or a wine shop. Had he not been afraid, he would have ventured to call on M. Aubret.

Well, and why not? Paul asked himself abruptly. No treatment could be more violent or unjust than what he had got from Delligny.

So it came about that the boy sat in my study once more, narrating his story and asking for counsel.

While listening, I noted his language. He had the same ready flow of words, but mixed with vulgar expressions and tripped with grammatical blunders.

As I sought indications not only in his present talk but in memories of our previous intercourse, what rose most compellingly before me was that taste of his for drawing. Not that I dreamed of making an artist of him.

I thought of French excellence in the decorative and industrial arts; an esteemed profession where he would meet with better contacts than in ordinary trades. Considering his lack of example, his drawings were creditable. I had noticed with particular pleasure that discouragement did not follow when a thing had been badly rendered. Thus I have seen him do over a score of times some sketch which perhaps had not been worth beginning, but was worth doing, once begun. Much of his leisure had been given to that sort of thing. Besides which, he observed furniture and objects of art; his descriptions were always accurate, and he had guessed that Mère Rollinet's mantel ornaments were of interest.

Various trades passed in review before us. There came a hesitation. I waited.

Locksmith, he suggested. Useful, and always sure

of work to do. Not overcrowded, like electricity and automobiles. Sometimes there was designing to be done, too; and art-forging. He knew one locksmith who had very handsome ornamental hinges in his windows, and keys with heads of gilt bronze open-work. Paul's sparkling eyes showed that he had found the solution simply by being allowed to express himself. I confirmed the soundness of his judgment. What I did not tell him was that I planned to send him to a designing school if his ability were proved.

I could not resist an inquiry as to whether his mother knew of this visit.

No, but he would tell her, he said. With a bashful smile he acknowledged her anger against me. That day, long ago, had been unfortunate. When he got home with my message about the clothes, she was issuing from a collision with the landlord about an increased rental because running water had been supplied her. Paul, breaking in and so engrossed with his own preoccupations that he had not read the signal of her cheeks, reaped the cyclone.

"But I didn't worry much," he declared philosophically. "I knew I should come back some time."

I wondered if a conviction of the kind did not lie at the base of most resignation.

He left me with a nod, after settling his cap on one side of his head. Grease-stains covered the apprentice-suit of blue drill; his hands were rough and dark, his face was dirty; but the step still had buoyancy, the voice cheeriness, and his neck and wrists were clean.

As he looked back at me with the full, wondering smile, I felt that while Paul had reached ugly shallows, he had barely touched their edge.

PART TWO
—
FAITH

I

ARISTIDE BADAJÈZE, the locksmith, took himself very seriously as an artist and public benefactor.

"Without my art to secure your doors and windows, how could you keep the trinkets made by other people?" he would ask.

This importance of the thief in society was much insisted upon, in his talk, as demonstrating his own utility. So, when friends spoke of a golden future awaiting the world from the growth of Socialism, and the approach of human brotherhood, he would exclaim:

"Disarmament? Peace among nations? Rid me first of robbers and cut-throats in towns, so that I need no locks to my house and no *gendarme* within call! When I leave my forge because not a citizen of Europe needs my help in its most practical form, then I may trust a country to be safe without an army!"

When he made these remarks to dampen the international love whose lulling spirit surrounded him, Aristide Badajèze was pronounced cynical, original, impossible. Sometimes men of his trade, who lacked his skill, even went so far as to pronounce him a bad brother.

Another of his eccentricities was a mania for air. The two broad windows where he exhibited his finest wares were at the front, in the rue de la Chaise Dorée, with the entrance between them. But the whole back of the shop, in the Place du Vieux Marché, disappeared when the shutters were taken down. M. Badajèze would stand

there working in his trousers and shirt, collarless and with sleeves rolled up, on cold sunless days when other inhabitants of Verviller shivered within tight doors and windows. A number of promising apprentices had been removed from his influence, because anxious parents could not allow their sons to contract tuberculosis for his amusement. Eccentrically, he denied the charge, asserting that fresh air, even when cold, was healthier than musty, never-changed atmospheres, though warm. Paul felt chilly at first, but liked it, and learned that the harder he worked the warmer he kept. Soon he no longer needed extra layers of clothes slipped under his drill jacket. Between the invigorating effects of clean air in his lungs all day, and hard work which genuinely appealed to him, he soon developed pink cheeks and a fine glow unknown to him since days in Arnan.

Paul's time was spent mostly over a forge or a vice, with a hammer or pincers or files. If the anvil did not ring merrily enough, or the mound of metal-dust grow rapidly enough, M. Badajèze would threaten to "give news of himself." That was his own expression. What happened when M. Badajèze was driven to such extremes, nobody knew. It must have been terrific, for he darted his eyes out at the mere suggestion. They did not precisely pop from his head, but appeared to do so. He would twirl them in a rapid circle, and would violently round his eyelids, looking very stern throughout the performance and for a moment afterwards. The result was startling, set in a sallow face relieved only by a yellow moustache mixed with grey, and surmounted by a head so smoothly bald that he said of himself, "I wear my hair *en brosse*—the back of the brush, you know!"

Strange devices of all sorts lay about the shop: huge

old-fashioned hinges that covered half a wardrobe door; locks and keys of another century, full of complicated springs and rich with wrought metal; decorative designs of hammered steel or carved brass, for purposes Paul could not guess. He would run his fingers lovingly over the surfaces, the turns and edges; he would study the patterns, and try to draw them from memory at night. The luxuries of the trade were not yet allowed him; even his admiration had to be reserved for spare moments, which rarely occurred in the shop. M. Badajèze held that an apprentice should learn to forge and cut and file and solder pieces of simple form, before meddling with questions into which art entered. He would illustrate this by a homely truth with an unexpected example:

“A baby must learn to crawl before it can walk. My daughter tried to begin by walking—just stood up and took two steps, one day. Well, I spanked her, tiny mite that she was, and taught her to crawl. It gave me trouble, because I myself had to get into practice for crawling, once more. But I would have no ill-trained, inefficient child bearing my name. And behold what Mademoiselle Badajèze is now!”

The house was next to the workshop; or rather, the shop had been added to an outer wall. Through a window in his dining-room or else through a glazed door raised three steps above the ground, M. Badajèze could watch the apprentices when he withdrew for a short rest. And when perchance he dozed over his folded hands, another pair of eyes watched for him. Those other eyes never looked unkindly nor reported unfairly. But they could show concern when anything irregular happened. Sometimes apprentices were tempted to abuse. As for Paul, he would have taken a hammer and smashed the

handsomest lock in the artistic collection, rather than be looked at again as he had been once, when he used a bicycle-shop oath after a boy had odiously interfered with him.

Mademoiselle Odette Badajèze was quite a young lady; seventeen years old, and not destined for any trade. With her figure, she would have made a splendid dress-maker, Paul gravely informed me. That she was a lady, there could be no doubt. A woman came to do her cooking and washing and rough house-work; she wore marvellous gowns, and gloves, too, on Sundays and feast days. Ordinarily she was clad in neat, simple blue, with a little white apron frilled all round the edge. Her father said she must wear an apron at certain hours, and that frill was her joke.

I urged Paul to give me an idea of her appearance: for I never saw this remarkable young lady.

"She is——" he would begin, and stop. "I wish you could see her," he would add presently. And his last word was always, "She's not like anybody else. I don't know how to describe her."

So I was fain to be content with phrases he let fall while discussing, on any chance occasion, her words or actions. I learned she had "very beautiful hair," and that it was "all wavy and brown, with some yellow in it—like bronze." Her voice he mentioned several times as "sweet," but more often as "warm"; he said it "did one good to hear" even when the words did not carry. He must have meant when both the door and the window were closed. From all I could gather, her features were worthy of such charms; but he mentioned only her chin—she had a way of putting her head on one side with the chin held up as she smiled at her father or Robert Lavenu,

and her eyes would grow big, very big and even fuller of light than usual.

The thought of Robert Lavenu, Marcel's soldier brother, would invariably repress his confidences. I believe he was jealous. From having been indifferent to questions of warfare as expounded by M. Badajèze, Paul came to be a sort of incipient anti-militarist. He remarked scathingly:

"Robert Lavenu pretends to have been so clever and patriotic, enlisting before his time. But it's because he did it that he became a dragoon and was able to stay in the neighbourhood, instead of being sent to the other end of France. And now you know how he manages to come home so often."

But it was not his visits to his home that Paul resented.

We had reached that spring during which so many "mistakes" occurred at the frontier, that pacific France was finally roused to ideas of self-defence. The papers were full of episodes and incidents whose official explanations rendered them only the more astonishing. Robert Lavenu would call frequently to discuss it all with M. Badajèze and Mademoiselle Odette.

"What are we waiting for? We must be avenged for these continual provocations!" he cried, clanking his sword.

"We are waiting to be attacked; and we shall not be ready," M. Badajèze replied, in that dry way of his, solemn yet with a grin at the back of it.

"Papa, I don't like the way you are talking," pouted Mademoiselle Odette. "It is not wise, as your ideas usually are. I agree entirely with M. Lavenu."

To which Paul added with emphasis: "And I *don't*." But he was addressing only me.

Paul had gone home at the usual hour. His father would not be in for a while, yet; his alleged mother sat heavily in her chair near the window.

Odd details showed that the house had been neglected. He made no motion to remedy them, for he had left school, he was doing a man's work. A soft snore presently told him that his mother slept. Of late, she had not been well. Weak in addition to irritable, and with peculiar, drawn features. Often she could not eat, though she was growing stout, and would start crying nobody knew why.

From his own seat in the corner farthest away from the table, Paul looked out into the street. Night was closing down. One or two lights shone prematurely across the way, flickering colourless and ridiculous. Their rays could not even pierce the atmosphere. Workmen passed, carrying tools or bundles; their shoulders were bowed and their feet shifted heavily. Paul wondered how long it would be before he walked so. Boys passed, too—apprentices like himself, walking already like their elders.

"That started me thinking," he observed when relating the scene to me. "It's not only because they are tired, but because they don't care, that workmen let themselves go. I said to myself, 'If I try not to walk like those boys now, then perhaps I needn't be like those men later.'"

The darkness grew deeper. Rays from the lights across the way cut long, clear shafts of silvered gold through the night, and struck the street. The end of one ray rested on a tiny tuft of grass, bringing each blade into relief—whereas by day Paul had been unaware of its existence. A foot was roughly planted on it, for an instant; the grass lay flattened, hideous. The foot had belonged to a boy; one running swiftly, who yelled something again and again.

Presently another boy ran past, yelling too. Paul got up and crept to the door, after an instant's thought of opening the window. But if the noise did not wake his mother, the air would.

Though narrow and having small importance, the street opened at one end into the Avenue de la République, and at the other connected with the business quarter; so there were hours when numbers of people went by. Its entire character had changed, however; the inhabitants themselves poured out of their houses.

Still another boy ran by, stopped to take a newspaper from his arm, and hurried on. Paul, mingling with the groups, listened to comments and tried to read a line or two of print.

"Ah, the pigs!" stormed a burly mason in grey corduroys. His boots were grey too, and his hands, and his face and hair. Only the thick neck stood out a startling red in the lustre of a near-by gas-jet. "Ah, the pigs! Openly spying, as well as insulting us!"

"Next thing, if we are not careful, we shall be at war," piped a wizened little carpenter. Paul knew he must be a carpenter, because of a place stitched in his trousers to hold a ruler. Only no ruler was there.

"You may talk—you're not fit for field service," grunted the mason. "I've got a wife and children to think of."

"They won't begrudge you!" said a woman. "I'll have to give a husband and a son—but I sha'n't hold them back!"

"I who saw 1870 tell you—keep out of war if you can," came the dictum of the carpenter. His cheeks were as parchinent above a sparse white beard; his voice was as weak as the light of his tired eyes. "There are things

we soldiers of that time don't talk about, my children. We know what Prussians are. Keep out of war if you can."

"Yes, but what if war is forced on us?" cried the woman. Hers was a massive form, surmounted by a small round head with fat rosy cheeks and black hair drawn very tightly to a knot on her ample neck. "Are we always to be fearing for our husbands and children? It must end some time. Let it come now!"

"It's all right for hot-heads to gossip at street-corners," the carpenter's plaintive voice returned. "But our political leaders know what is needed. If we could make peace three times within eight years, we can let them play about this time again."

"What, on our own soil?" exclaimed a newcomer. Marcel Lavenu could be trusted to find centres of excitement.

"A boy knows nothing of such matters," cried the little old man who looked like a carpenter.

"Boy or not, I earn a man's living—which is more than you can pretend to do, Père Elard!" Marcel retorted. "And I'm ready to fight, which is more than you are. Which of us, then, has the better right to talk?"

"The one who does the least thinking," said the old man sharply. And, considering the point proved at the boy's expense, he proceeded to hold forth: "There will be strikes. When the war begins, if we are foolish enough to risk it, we shall be paralysed to helplessness by our own people. You needn't shake your heads."

"Nonsense!" said the mason. "We have but to hold the frontier forty-eight hours, and the whole country will be swept by an enthusiasm which no enemy could stem. If we were to penetrate into Alsace—if we could claim

to have reconquered by force of arms as much as one yard of our lost provinces—then, my friends, pity Germany! For our ardour would crush her as surely as my heel now crushes this pebble.”

He brought his foot down with a resounding thud. The noise satisfied his audience. But the pebble had escaped unharmed; round and polished, it slipped under the blow, and shot out. Paul knew; for it struck his ankle.

“That’s the way a French workman talks,” Marcel declared. “The matter with Père Elard is that he fears for his *rentes*.”

It appeared that the old carpenter without tools lived on a little income supplied by distant relatives.

“What has happened?” Paul asked Marcel in an excited, breathy whisper.

“German aeroplane, mounted by officers in uniform, landed far on our side of the frontier, at Arracourt. They plead a ‘mistake’ as usual, of course. So was their Zeppelin cruising over our national territory by ‘mistake’ three weeks ago,—and kept on ‘mistaking’ for a hundred miles more. So it was by ‘mistake’ that their boy scouts, led by an officer of the active army, crossed our frontier with flag flying and band playing two days ago, selecting by ‘mistake’ the very frontier post where war was very nearly forced on us before you and I were born. So it was by ‘mistake’—but what’s the use of recalling it all? We can’t put up with this sort of thing for ever; we have self-respect as a nation, or else we haven’t. I shall go off as a bicycle-scout. Don’t you wish you had stuck to my trade? The war may be on already, while these silly people are gabbling here. I can’t waste any more time.” After a few paces, he stopped: “Paul!” And

as the other came up slowly yet eagerly: "My brother Robert's at home—he will know. Let's run for it. Come along!"

He set the pace, Paul following.

Robert Lavenu was in his father's carriage-house, seated on the step of a luxurious equipage. Draped in sheeting, it made a mountain behind him; or perhaps a throne. Before him several youngsters from the town and a couple of stable-boys were clustered, some standing, others perched on boxes. The steps of less imposing vehicles lay invitingly accessible; but, from deference to the hero, were unoccupied. Marcel himself sat modestly on the floor. Lucky they had not chosen the stables, Paul reflected as he threw himself down near his friend.

The young dragoon wore a blue and red uniform, with leather boot-tops reaching nearly to his knees and spurs that jingled when he stamped his foot as he often did, and a huge sword which he seemed to catch between his legs on purpose to make it clank. His cap was thrust back on his head; a cigarette decorated his lips, above which downy hairs were visible.

"You boys can see for yourselves how right I was," he declared, magnificently discarding a half-burned cigarette and lighting another. "Here, want to smoke? Take some, all of you."

He tossed the package. They were real soldiers' cigarettes, of the coarsest, sharpest tobacco. Everybody took one. There were now nine little glows of smouldering ash in the semi-gloom caused by one lantern in conflict with the night of the carriage-house.

"If I hadn't anticipated my conscription, I shouldn't be ready to do much good, for it will be a short and terrible campaign," the trooper went on sagaciously. "But

there are a hundred thousand in France who've done like me."

The statement was received with a gasp. One of the stable-boys ventured a "Really? As many as that?"

"As many? Much more!" declared Robert Lavenu. "Why! The military authorities don't know what to do with the new volunteers who keep on pouring in. At some places, enlistments are being refused unless they are for four or five years. No other way to get rid of part of the men who feel they can't possibly wait until autumn. I could name barracks where the old class is being released in advance, to make room."

"How long have you known war was coming, Robert?" Marcel broke in. "You didn't tell me."

"That sort of information isn't for civilians," the warrior of nineteen retorted grandly. "If I can talk now, it's only because of what has just happened. Our major keeps repeating: 'We shall do nothing to provoke war, but it's bound to come, and you boys must work hard to be ready for it.' That's what he tells us, but he doesn't know anything—oh, no! Nor do we."

Again he passed the cigarettes, roundly cursing Paul in most magnificent trooper style for not having finished yet. He had no idea who the boy was; but Paul, ignoring this detail, appreciated the courtesy shown him by a rival, and a military rival at that.

Lavenu went on to describe his new mode of life. In bed at nine and up at five, he was sleeping well for the first time in years. He could not say he precisely liked taking care of the horses. Dirty work, and often dangerous. That very morning, he had had his cape torn off and just saved his left cheek from the jaws of a vicious mare. But the discipline, the regularity, the exercise

were highly agreeable; and as for health—well, boys, judge for yourselves!

The tactless youth of the stables again interposed:

“I know some soldiers who complain.”

“They are not philosophers. You can find people in all trades who want the fun and whine at the work. That’s the psychology of kickers in the army. I’ve observed them at close quarters.”

Swift questions were asked and answered throughout the group; all agreed that those who complained of life in the ranks had previously complained about most things they had been forced to do.

In his excitement, the trooper had let his cigarette go out—quite a fresh one. A big overgrown boy with a head like a gibbous moon and a face a size too large for it, held out a box of matches, saying:

“They’re English. I got them from a friend.”

“If the English stand by us, all will be well,” said Robert Lavenu, looking at a gaudy picture on the box. “We need only their navy, but a landing army would help at the frontier.”

As he was striking the match, a line of fine print under the picture caught his eye. Leaving the seat of state, he went up to the lantern, read carefully, flushed with anger, and sent the box flying into the street:

“*Made in Germany*, you sort of a sacred imbecile! What good patriot—what real comrade—has a *French* match to give me?”

The culprit stole away into the night; others slipped out as if the guilt were theirs. The trooper was left puffing, furiously silent, while stable-boys talked nonsense.

Alone in the deserted stillness of the town echoing his footsteps, Paul felt the weight of catastrophe already

upon him. He saw his father mobilised; himself alone with the mother who was not even his stepmother. His sentiments contained nothing noble nor heroic nor generous. Years before, his grandfather's words had suggested that war was not nice. Having thought about it since, and listened to various opinions, he had come to the conclusion that wars did not solve anything, but only killed a lot of people and cost much money which survivors paid in taxes. Five years more, and he too would be called out. Whatever Robert Lavenu might say of the rosy side of it, he would have to dress in somebody else's cast-off uniform; sleep on unclean straw in noisy, windy barracks; eat coarse beef and beans boiled in salt, and soggy soldier-bread; be drilled and marched regardless of weather, and ordered about by a rough non-commissioned officer. For what? To be killed if war came, and lose his deftness at trade if war did not come.

He found his father looking very grave over the paper; his mother sat pale and limp over her extraordinary form. They did not ask why he was late, nor notice him at all as he ate dinner between them.

Bed-time came. They did not seem to hear Paul's good-night. But as though his voice or his movement had roused her from a trance, the woman spoke.

"Albert—"she had never appealed so gently—"do you know that if the war comes, I have no right to an allowance because you are in the army; and our child——"

Paul stumbled out into the hall. The blood surged furiously within him; he was stifled, could scarcely control his muscles to go upstairs. Reaching his room, he opened the window. The night was so black that he could not see his beloved river-banks; the course of the water itself was marked by a faint ghost-like trail of mist. At last

he breathed once more: not because of the free air which rushed to him, but because he could hurl into space an indignation too great for mere earth to contain——

Their child? God help him—NO!

II

"I'VE been to the château again," Paul said to me. "Not as a tourist, but invited by the Marquis."

"Invited?" I echoed.

"Yes. M. Badajèze is repairing some Louis XV bronzes for him—very beautiful. And I am to go, always; the Marquis wishes it."

Once, twice, or thrice in the course of a week or ten days, Paul came to see me soon after dinner. Our evenings were divided between study and conversation. Occasionally he would bring me problems of a political or a philosophical order; and my replies, if happily phrased, would be rewarded with the wondering smile. Seen less rarely, nowadays, it had not suffered in charm nor in spontaneity.

Treated by his master with bluff good-nature, sufficient encouragement, and laudable firmness, Paul was liked and trusted by an amiable, bibulous head-workman whose "friend to speak to at the corner" came many times a day, but resulted only in stiff solemnity and a wish not to be disturbed at a task which never suffered in consequence.

Among the boys, Paul recognised one, Henri, as a good, steady little workman; and for another, Ernest, he had sympathy because, living in a railway van, his behaviour was yet becoming and his zeal unfailing. But still another was a problem for Paul and a source of preoccupation for me.

André Manadan, the chief culprit in the theft and

scandal at Delligny's, had come pretending never to have worked in Verviller, bringing his mother and a letter to corroborate the statement that he had spent a year with relatives in the country. M. Badajèze had been out, and the *compagnon* was pursuing a "customer at the corner," for a change; so Mademoiselle Odette had received the dreary, slovenly woman seeming younger than the wreck of a boy who tried to hide behind skirts even more meagre and retiring than he.

Mademoiselle Odette must have been smitten with compassion and pleaded for him when her father returned. Surely M. Badajèze could not have put faith in the boy's shifty eyes with bluish circles under them, conspicuous features in a withered, greenish face; nor did he lack extensive choice of possible material for apprentices. Or perhaps he decided, arbitrary and charitable, to give this eminently hopeless wastrel a chance. Such an action would not have been out of keeping with his character. Strict in the sense of duty towards his "art," he would not have allowed the excellence of his output to be compromised; but among six boys, one on an average was apt to turn out badly, and logic may have whispered that, beginning ill in such a case, he might end well while doing a kindness.

The chance did not, however, improve André Manadan, Paul told me. The very healthiness of their surroundings gave him opportunities for deception and unfairness. Somehow, he always managed to conceal his blunders as well as his deliberate evil, escaping reprimand and winning consideration. Given an adequate dose of hypocrisy, it was easy to blind the bibulous *compagnon*. M. Badajèze had sharper eyes, but when he was about, the little sneak knew better than to run risks.

"If a key is found, quite spoiled, thrown under the work-bench, it's never the one he had; or if there's proof it was, then he pretends he finished somebody else's."

"Or complains of his tools," I suggested.

"No. M. Badajèze soon cures us of that. He says: 'It's a poor workman who complains of his tools—the good workman goes and gets what he needs.' André Manadan just lies about it, and sticks to the lie so he can outface anybody. What can you do, anyhow, with a slippery worm so soft you mustn't step on it, and so dirty you wouldn't touch it, and so disgusting you can't be comfortable when it's in the room? He actually tried to be pals with me because I'd been discharged through his fault. I told him what I thought of that, but he only laughed. If he hadn't been so weak and little and miserable, I'd have slapped him next day, when he sneered at Mademoiselle Odette. I swore at him so hard, though, that he stopped his insolence to her and his interference with me. Now he looks at me out of the corners of his yellow eyes and talks about comradeship and loyalty till I get sick of both."

Next day, I, too, received an "invitation" to the château; mine was for lunch. Once I had met the Marquis in Paris, at the house of a noted psychologist; he had been interested in my work on racial and social movements. He had a fancy for scientific and philosophical ideas provided they neither demanded close study nor conflicted with his religious beliefs. I should have called on him when he returned to Verviller, but did not, for I shrank from society obligations. Since he remembered me now, it must be that he saw a relation between my principles as then expounded and the international events

which had re-awakened patriotism in France. Beneath these manifestations of human energy, the vast laws to whose analysis I devoted my life were at work; and, flattered that he should be aware of this, I went to the château.

Often, in my walks, I had passed those stately windows and cornices and chimney-tops. It was a splendid pile, which many tourists came to see; mainly Renaissance, it had not been altered at all since the period of Louis XV; its halls and rooms were filled with handsome and suitable furniture, hangings, pictures, piously collected by several generations of Vervillers to repair the havoc of the Revolution. The Marquis of that period, like the present one, had been a kindly old gentleman, spending on the town each year a considerable portion of his revenues. The people had loved their XVIIIth Century lord as they loved the present Marquis; which had not deterred them from plundering and destroying his goods and chattels, under the pretext of fraternity and other humanitarian sentiments. They would have carried their exertions in his behalf to the degree of stringing him up on a lamp-post, if he had not been arrested at Paris and fittingly guillotined as an aristocrat. In old days, the town's name had been spelled with a final "s" like that of the family which gave it birth. But Revolutionary principles had abolished that superfluous, hence luxurious, hence aristocratic and abominable letter; and no effort since made by the lords of Vervillers had induced the locality to abandon plebeian vulgarity in the shape of Verviller.

I thought of this, going through the wrought-iron gates which led almost immediately to the door. The town pressed close upon the château; the estates had

been confiscated and sold, and could not be recovered when the son of the beheaded Marquis preferred his claim under the Restoration. A street ran within three yards of windows which once had commanded a lawn and an avenue leading to the church—whose steeple still challenged the towering chimneys, but above homely house-tops.

As I rang, a boy in workingman's clothes came out by the side-door. It was Paul, who greeted me with a nod; one hand carried a small parcel, the other did not seek his cap. The free-and-easy way of the bicycle-shop had adhered to him, but without insolence; had transformed itself into that rare, unconscious form of freedom proper to the light heart and the direct mind unfettered by ambitions or prejudices, unable to feel inferiority of position because grasping superiority only of mind or of achievement. I had just nodded back, when a couple of footmen took charge of me, intensifying their professional solemnity to atone for my breach of manners in perceiving an apprentice. One of them, conspicuously accustomed to the best families, punished me at luncheon by twice omitting to serve me.

The Marquis's words of greeting confirmed my belief that he had sought renewed contact because of our conversation. There was another guest, introduced as Frère Alexandre; from the name and from Paul's description, I knew him to be the superior of the Brothers' school. I wondered how, after the application of the law against religious orders, he should still be here, in his habit; occupying his original post, too, as I presently learned.

The Marquis de Vervillers, stout and of average height, with sparse, carefully brushed hair and an ample mous-

tache grey nearly to whiteness, had that species of dignity found in two categories of men. Early training and wide experience, reinforced by the custom of exalted position, can give it; or else the consciousness of a high and rare genius which has proved its worth and attained maturity. Frère Alexandre, on the contrary, was characterised by the cultured simplicity and genuine amiability sometimes found among men in orders who can be earnest while avoiding bigotry.

We were no sooner seated at table than the Marquis began to question me about my ideas. I gave, as rapidly and concisely as I could, a summary of the work to which I had devoted forty years and more. Listening with deep interest, asking an appropriate question or making a commentary to Frère Alexandre, the Marquis led me on; and when I had finished, he opened a new conversation, just as easily, on local charities and religious questions. Then it was I understood that the motive for my presence had not yet been revealed. I took to wondering why I was there—reflecting that Paul's "invitation" had been more logical and more useful.

"Equality?" the Marquis said, capping a remark from Frère Alexandre. "I never mention it, because it is of those things which destroy themselves. Equality dies as soon as created, since it reposes on the principle of proving oneself better than one's neighbour. Every day we see men working to tear down all that exists, all that is noble and beautiful, all that tradition has handed us, all that education and civilisation have done to make gentlemen. And these same men have the one ambition of bettering their own positions and giving higher education to their own children! If culture is wrong in others, if all that reveres tradition is reaction, if elevation is to be

scorned and denounced and fought against, then surely these conditions do not change their essential character when applied to oneself. In order to be sincere, he who contemns superiority in others should not seek it for himself nor for those near him,—lest he proclaim himself selfishly ambitious. But hypocrisy is a profitable policy in the world; by crying down others, a man attracts attention to them, diverting it from himself; and so the day comes when he can safely throw down what was noble and refined, to put himself in its place—and begin the refining and nobilising process if he will. Only often he will not.”

Very well worded, and uttered most eloquently. I remembered reading a newspaper report of it, the first time he got it off in a public address. At least, I presume it was the first time.

Frère Alexandre listened, pale, cool, resigned. He spoke softly, evenly:

“The trouble, M. le Marquis, lies not so much with what is being done for the labouring classes, or with the methods employed, as with the material chosen for such efforts. Right influence goes farther than evil, where a nucleus of good hearts is the field for sowing. I have observed many boys, from those now seven years old back to those who reached that age when I began teaching, more than thirty years ago. As long as the heart is right, defects of character are secondary matters; as soon as the heart goes wrong, the struggle is seemingly hopeless. I say seemingly, because God in His wisdom has ways we do not know. But men dare not hope in such cases, even where duty bids us persevere. Take my word for it—classify your material by the amount of heart possessed; and if you on your side are blessed with the celestial

quality of love, you will succeed. A narrow doctrine, you may think. Yet justified by the parable of the sower with the seed. That falling among rocks and tares was negligible, provided that in good earth profited.—You look scandalised, Monsieur,” he added, turning his gentle eyes and thoughtful forehead towards me. “I do not know how much personal experience you have had with charitable works——”

“None,” I said dryly. “Now I have scandalised you. I shall completely mortify your better feelings, I fear, by adding that I consider ‘charity’ an outrage to brother man. How can we ‘give’ when we have nothing of our own? Can we do more than share—provided we are not encouraging vice nor neglecting sacred duties to ourselves or to those dependent on us? I am sorry if my words offend you,—or you, Marquis——”

“Not at all, not at all. I feel entirely as you do,” the Marquis assured me. “And I have heard Frère Alexandre express himself similarly.”

When one of my periods of insomnia sets in, I still wonder, in the night, how the opinions stated by the Brother and himself could be reconciled with mine. But perhaps I was not meant for a society man.

The Marquis next spoke warmly of Frère Alexandre’s work to regenerate France by continuing Catholic education in our town. Politically, I knew, M. de Vervillers had left Monarchism aside for Catholicism; while not believing the Royalist cause to be dead as some pretended, he considered it could be best served by allowing various waves of violent feeling to blow in other directions. The association between Frère Alexandre and himself in this new programme was close.

“Alas! You exaggerate my importance here, M. le

Marquis, and I fear you overrate the influence which any of us may have," the Brother said sadly. "God, in His infinite mercy, grant you may be right. But I, beholding the fatal slope upon which our Republic is launched—remembering the catastrophes visited upon us during these ten years—talking with men whom I have known since days when their boyish souls kept no secrets from me—hearing in their words the admission of a weakened faith, an altered conscience, a loosened morality, a freedom which constitutes the worst of tyrannies because it is as absolute as it is unbounded,—I say that forty years will be needed to undo the harm so lightly done. You and I—and you, M. Aubret—shall not live to see the beginning of a change. When the boys now corrupted in Communal schools have grown up and done their worst by our unhappy country, then a still younger generation will appreciate the necessity to turn, as did their glorious forefathers, to the path shown them by our Saviour and His Blessed Mother. The reaction may come then, but not before."

"Young Clermont may live to see it," the Marquis observed.

And as I looked up in unconcealed amazement that the Marquis de Vervillers should mention a locksmith's apprentice—though an art-locksmith—at his antique table in his ancestral dining-hall, he quietly informed me that he had bought the Brothers' school, and provided it with a complete staff of principal and teachers, all laymen. The Government had not yet been able to dispossess him. Frère Alexandre's official part consisted only in being a modest tenant, who rented an upstairs room for his personal use.

Laughing, the Marquis led the way to a small salon

where coffee and liqueurs and things to smoke were brought. When the servants had gone out, closing the door, he addressed me:

"I believe you know young Clermont?"

Then I knew that neither racial questions nor religious controversies had suggested this triangular luncheon party. We were to deal with my Paul; perhaps discuss his future on the basis of "charity." A pang of jealousy shot through me—soon drowned in a frothing sea of indignation.

III

ONE of those pauses fell, in which we notice a bit of broken match on a table, or any other irrelevant thing with an importance borrowed from the intensity of men during great emotions or planning delicate endeavours. Two of us, I think—the second being Frère Alexandre—were in the first category of men, at that moment; the Marquis was in the other.

"I find myself in a distressing dilemma, M. Aubret," the Marquis de Vervillers began. "Duties towards the community, perhaps towards public morals, stand on the one hand; a desire to be as merciful as circumstances permit rises on the other. Stated thus simply, the situation might seem clear. But an element of doubt envelops it; and any further inquiries would involve the very person I wish to spare. Frère Alexandre informs me that you take a particular interest in young Clermont. Before deciding, I should be happy to hear your opinion of this boy—and of the facts concerning him."

"You don't mean he was committed any—any——" I could not utter the word.

The Marquis nodded:

"He has been working here. Badajèze is repairing some valuable old bronzes for me; he seems to trust this Clermont, and, knowing the master, I asked no questions. After a week's experience, I must say I have no trust left. If it had not been for Frère Alexandre, the judicial inquiry would already have been instituted."

The Brother sighed, and his weary eyelids drooped assentingly. The hand with which he adjusted a fold of his black gown quivered slightly.

"You don't mean for theft?" I managed to gasp.

"The charge has not been brought," the Marquis pursued. "No questions have yet been asked, nor information sought. You see, once I send for Badajèze, the matter can no longer be stopped. There is no possible doubt as to what has occurred. There is only hesitation as to the amount of severity I should show. It must be borne in mind that this boy, who now turns out so badly, is a former pupil of our Catholic school."

Frère Alexandre made a deprecating gesture with the thin, blue-veined hands which Paul had described to me:

"I beg of you, M. le Marquis, be careful. He was with us scarcely half a year. All his real educational influences came from the Communal school."

"You know that we should be held responsible, *mon frère*," the Marquis returned, rather grimly. "Our anti-clerical adversaries would say, 'Five months of religious influence sufficed to pervert the youth's mind, so that seven full years of Republican education could not straighten out the twists.' The man Clermont is in the tax service; a scandal about his son would certainly be followed by inquiries with pre-arranged charges against the legality of our school. This would mean definite closing."

"Think only of the general principle, M. le Marquis; only of the general principle. Whether we are to be charitable or not—that is our sole concern. I plead for Christian charity. His father has married the woman, remember; a civil marriage, I regret to say, but that is better than a life of open, insolent licentiousness setting a deplorable example."

So the marriage had taken place. Paul had been very sober, of late, but had not mentioned family affairs.

"If they did not ask the blessing of the Church, it is no marriage, and does not concern me," said the Marquis. "Besides, the father is dangerous. Mainly because of his position, since he lacks influence personally. But a mediocre mind like his, conforming itself readily to popular doctrines, must always be handled carefully."

"He has conformed to them by marrying the woman at the *Mairie*; his influence may grow."

"The boy's responsibility is what counts; the rest must be set aside," the Marquis exclaimed with impatience. "Whether I myself proceed against him, or whether I allow him the benefit of an unreal doubt so that he may continue on his career of vice and be caught elsewhere, a scandal is awaiting him and, consequently, us. I am frank in admitting that the possible effect upon my school interests me very particularly. Is it better for us to face this now, or to gain time? The Government has been seeking a pretext for new proceedings. I have already escaped four attempts at application of the original law, and one or two additional bills passed on purpose to catch any who might be immune. But I can't hope for such success indefinitely."

He had turned to me. I addressed him:

"Since you are frank in explaining your motives,

Monsieur—"my tone was very formal—"perhaps you would kindly be frank also in telling me what all this is about. You are so good as to ask my opinion on a matter you don't make clear."

"I am very sorry!" the Marquis said with charming simplicity. "These last days, I have talked so much to Frère Alexandre that it seemed as if all the details—— Well! I shall be brief, for the subject is unsavoury."

Whereupon he proceeded, in the leisurely manner of the cultured amateur, to develop, first, a theme which never could fail in its appeal to him:

"My father was fortunate enough to find, in Italy, some very handsomely carved mirror ornaments. French Louis XV bronze. They exactly suited this château; were, in fact, similar to some of the same period whose traces could still be seen. Ours had been looted during the Revolution; probably sold for a few *livres*, and melted eventually for Napoleon's wars, like almost all the brass and bronze art-work in France. That is why we can usually secure, now, only vulgar Empire designs if we wish authentic pieces, or else abominable imitations. Fortunately for people of taste, much of our best work had been bought by foreigners or else left abroad by French Ministers and residents; and so some of it drifts home again. These pieces I have mentioned were beautiful, almost unique, and became famous; experts and collectors have come to study them. As a precaution, I allowed them to be copied. It was well I did, for they suffered, one summer I let the château to some rich Americans."

I must have betrayed my surprise. For I knew the French nobility did not let ancestral homes so long as it was possible for them to maintain their position. And

the Vervillers were reputed wealthy. Had not the present Marquis been able to afford lavish bounties to the town—including the purchase and endowment of a lay school for the furtherance of Conservative and Catholic sentiments?

“The Republic makes things very hard for the nobility, M. Aubret,” he went on. “The law compelling us to divide our property equally among our children has as sole object the breaking up of estates. The château must go with my title to the Count de Vervillers; but it will be estimated at so much to be deducted from my gross estate for division into equal shares. Of course, there are arrangements; our family is a united one, and my heir is guardian for part of the property devolving by law to his sister. Well, that summer we were threatened with new taxes, my wife was ill and in the mountains, my children were away, I did not like the prospect of remaining here alone, and I allowed myself to be tempted by an advantageous offer. When I resumed possession, several roses and love-knots were broken from the bronzes. The tenants disclaimed responsibility; accused tourists of souvenir-collecting; but they paid most generously, in true American style, rather than be worried by the complications of French jurisprudence when I referred the matter to my attorney.

“Several years had passed, when, last month, I called in Badajèze. He undertook the work of restoration, and carried two pieces away with him. He had occasion to send young Clermont with a message; I noticed the boy. While I esteem the master-craftsman, I find him disturbing; his ideas are very subversive, I don’t like to have him about the place.

“When he came to consult me over some complication,

I said, 'Who is that boy? Is he reliable? Yes? Then send him, in the future, for simple things an apprentice can attend to. You are too much of an artist to give your time to small details; spare yourself as much as possible.'

"And then?" I prompted.

"The boy brought pieces back, and put them in place. They needed only adjusting with their own screws, which had been set aside. But they were not my originals with restorations. They were clever copies."

"Made by a boy so inexperienced?" I interposed.

"No. Substituted by him. Copies already existed, remember."

"Did you keep trace of those you authorised?"

"You believe in the boy, evidently. So did I, once."

"May I——"

"Oh, certainly! Badajèze made the copies. All I know beyond this rests on his word that he kept them."

"And it has not occurred to you to question Badajèze?"

"Yes. My first idea, as it is yours. But consider. He is no fool, and may be wealthier than I, since he has few demands upon him. Why should he risk a stupid theft, sure of detection and leading to disgrace?"

Perhaps M. Badajèze did not think so highly of the Marquis's taste and knowledge as the Marquis himself did, was my inner comment.

"No, Badajèze is morally incapable of such an act," M. de Vervillers went on. "The first question addressed to him on the subject would start young Clermont in the path leading straight to a reformatory. But for Frère Alexandre, the step would already have been taken."

"Your humanitarian sentiments caused you to hesitate, to reflect," Frère Alexandre deprecated suavely. "It

was natural that your emotions upon discovering the fraud should have found an intense expression."

"Luckily, Frère Alexandre chanced to be here." The Marquis still addressed me. "I took him in the drawing-room to admire the bronzes. The gilding caught my eye. I thought the light had played me a trick. Running my fingers over the intricate inner edges, and looking closely, I detected a smoothness proper to mouldings, not to antique hand-carvings. Where the new work was supposed to be, I could not find evidences of joining. Besides which, one or two slight defacements of the originals, which were to have been restored also, had not been changed. I could no longer doubt that these were Badajèze's copies, admirable like everything he undertakes, but frauds conspicuous to the eye of a connoisseur. In my anger, I was for summoning Badajèze at once. Frère Alexandre stopped me, recalling that the boy had been a pupil at our school, and suggesting consequences——"

"The principle of it, M. le Marquis, the principle of it! I remember quite distinctly that I insisted upon this. Of course I thought, too, of the child whose mind I had tried to fashion for happier destinies. But it was the principle——"

"Precisely," assented the Marquis. "And in the days which have elapsed, we have continued to discuss the principle, M. Aubret. The idea of talking with you before the affair goes further was his, and met with my entire approval. Since you are not only well acquainted with the boy, but appear to take an interest in him——"

"Give me a week, and I undertake to prove his innocence," I answered hotly. "Meanwhile, will you both agree to keep the matter to yourselves?"

Not a notion as to methods had come to me. I was only sure of my boy, and that sufficed.

The Marquis and the Brother exchanged a look of veiled significance which made me grow hot and cold in several quick successions.

"This is more than I dared hope for," the Marquis said. "You apparently hold a partial confession. In that case, you should deal more plainly with me." Though he was consummately courteous, his eyes had hardened.

"Where he has nothing to confess, I have nothing to learn from him," I said. "Others will supply you with proofs in his favour. I know the boy you are accusing; your lightness surprises me, Monsieur. If I ask for discretion, it's only that the culprit may not escape."

"One week," he mused. "One week, during which you would personally conduct an inquiry for which, I believe, philosophical researches in racial movements are not the surest of preparations, M. Aubret. You don't mind my saying this? I fear the first result of your detective activities would be the irretrievable disappearance of my bronzes."

"Will you name the value attached to them?" I demanded. "If it be within my means to offer you the cash guarantee——"

"My dear sir!" exclaimed the Marquis, utterly shocked. "Where it is a question of authentic Louis XV bronze work, with the original gilding, belonging to the Château de Vervillers——"

"And bought by your father in an Italian junk-shop," I returned impulsively.

The Marquis observed me in silence for a moment, and spoke freezingly:

"You may, if you please, defend a boy whom you

prefer to consider innocent. But I have been gravely wronged, and I hold proofs. Unless I am mistaken, there is fresh evidence in the house at this very moment."

He rang.

"Has the apprentice from Badajèze's returned?" he asked the servant. "Send him in."

The servant having gone, he addressed me once more:

"Before further repairs should be done, I told Badajèze, two pieces must be cleaned. A risk; but I was sending those to help find the others. My entire series, if robbed of two, would lose half the value. Now that you know four are at stake, you will appreciate my desire for prompt action. The pieces to be cleaned were taken by young Clermont himself to-day at twelve, on the express understanding that they must be brought back at half-past two."

That was why my poor Paul had passed me at the door, sending me his gay, familiar nod.

A knock came. A boy entered. Not Paul. He delivered two bits of delicate bronze-work into the Marquis's hand. After examining the metal, the Marquis dismissed him with a tip. We heard the steps receding.

"These are mine—and the messenger was not Clermont. The evidence is more conclusive than I anticipated."

"May I ask what your next move will be?" My voice was unsteady.

"The police shall decide for me this afternoon."

"You have waited several days: wait for one more," I pleaded.

"My motives for haste should be clear, I think. Must I add that I am acquainted with this boy's record at Delligny's?"

Frère Alexandre looked so unhappy that I knew whence that information came.

"He was totally blameless, as any truthful witness can establish," I said. "The only difference between his innocence there and his innocence here is, that even at such a place as Delligny's there was no person irresponsible enough to bring an unsubstantiated charge."

The Marquis held up his hand:

"You can no longer fail to appreciate, Monsieur, that my chief concern is to avoid painful consequences while recovering objects of art which could not possibly be replaced. When I asked you to do me the pleasure of coming to-day, I wished for an expression of your opinion, but I also had a definite proposition to make. You enjoy the boy's confidence. Get full avowals from him and the return of the stolen pieces. Frère Alexandre, and you, and I, and the unhappy boy himself, shall be the only ones to know. Badajèze shall never suspect why this apprentice left him. For of course we must send him away from Verviller, where he would be bound to fall again in evil ways. I shall see that he is properly taken care of, and educated to better principles. His parents shall know just enough to ensure their consent.—Will you consider this?"

"No."

"You may be condemning him to prison."

"I think not. For I shall make his case mine, and shall spend my last franc, if necessary, in his defence." I rose.

"Let us hope you may not be compelled to do so. My course will be decided upon only after consulting people competent in such questions."

With most exquisite courtesy, the Marquis saw me to his door, renewing his thanks for my opinion, and all but

reopening the issue of racial movements. My last glimpse of Frère Alexandre showed him palely, mournfully motionless in a graceful, gilt-limbed, silk-swathed arm-chair.

IV

MY IDEA was to see Paul at once in his workshop. Going first to my house, I took a padlock from a cupboard door and tried to break it. The thing was too confoundedly well made. Next, straining upon the key I tried to force the spring, and failed conspicuously. Then throwing the key aside I put the padlock in my pocket.

Several apprentices were at the work-table, under their master's supervision, when I entered. No sign of Paul. I have since asked myself how I found time or thought to glance towards the house-window. Delectable Mademoiselle Odette was not at her post.

Addressing M. Badajèze, I told a story of a lost key.

"Not very seriously lost," he observed. "How fortunate you took the precaution of tying it!"

Indeed, I had failed to notice it was fastened to the padlock by a string, and had dangled from my pocket all this while.

"Er—yes," I said. "Would you try it? There's something wrong."

M. Badajèze snapped it again and again, with aggressive cheer.

"Like a child going to the dentist," I said. "But the pain comes back, you know. Please examine it at your leisure, and do whatever may be necessary."

"A little rust, perhaps." The artistic locksmith effected the cure almost before finishing the diagnosis. "I promise there will be no more complaints. Only a suggestion of oil smeared on the key with my finger, did you

notice? The trouble which careless people cause me, by pouring big drops into their locks, and often salad-oil, at that! Indescribable!" He was fond of delivering such homilies. They impressed with his variety of information, and also showed he was not proud.

I asked what I owed him.

"Nothing, Monsieur."

"I shall remember I am in your debt. You have taken considerable interest in a young friend of mine—your apprentice Clermont. He is giving satisfaction, I hope?"

"He will make a workman."

"You already send him out in the town?"

"Not often."

"Yet I don't see him." I had to insist, the man would give me no clue.

"His mother sent for him unexpectedly," said Aristide Badajèze, leading me towards the door. He had small time to waste on customers who did not discuss art.

The news of Paul's "unexpected" call preoccupied me. I knew the inferences which might be drawn.

I went to Delligny's bicycle shop on the chance of identifying Marcel Lavenue and using him as messenger. He was not visible, and I had the pleasure of buying a pneumatic pump, the first thing I saw, from the proprietor in person. Casting about for means to reach Marcel, I lingered a few minutes, questioning; by good fortune, that pump was a new model. Then my guardian angel or Paul's brought possible consequences in a vivid flash before me. After publicly tampering with Aristide Badajèze, here I was at Delligny's after young Lavenue! I paid for my absurd purchase, and fled.

At the end of a score of yards, I found myself suddenly held up:

"Monsieur! Monsieur! You forgot your pump!" A boy had been despatched after me.

"Oh, thanks!" I said. And taking it grimly, I gave him half a franc.

"You are sure you know how to use it?" he asked.

"I suppose so."

"Because if you want me to explain——"

"If necessary, I can come back," was my answer, delivered curtly.

The boy, black-eyed with a merry pink face, looked unnecessarily grieved, I thought. I have since known that he was none other than Marcel Lavenu himself.

Renouncing further ambition as a detective, I went to Paul's house. Luck was with me; he opened the door, and I told him I must see him that night.

"Don't fail, Paul. Whatever may happen, don't fail."

"I had intended to come. I shall not fail." His eyes were red, his cheeks pale and drawn.

In my study once more, I read until the pages swam before me. There had, indeed, been but two pages, I believe; two solid blocks of lettering smeared black, with white spaces around and between as the book lay open on a lectern. For the life of me I could not say what the book was. The binding was leather, and the title long; fine print, with few paragraphs. A learned book, probably.

Five o'clock! And he never came earlier than eight-fifteen. Why, in the name of all that's sane or sensible on earth, had I not told him to come at once? He could have obeyed, evidently. My constant idea since leaving the Marquis had been that I must see the boy that night. Having to devise means and methods, I had been caught unaware by the change in my main thought. No altering now; what harm there might be, was done.

His appearance, so changed since noon; his words about intending to come; the fact he had escaped from the shop and let another boy go on his errand to the château;—weighed upon me. For the first time it occurred to me that he might, in some silly, innocent way, have found himself compromised, and not known what to do.

Intolerable hours passed. Those two ink-blurred pages on the lectern afforded no relief. And all objects near me brought useless thoughts of Paul. If I tried looking from my window, I remembered him in his artless days; if I rested idle within my room, each thing served to recall some phrase or gesture.

Entering my study, that night, Paul closed the door and stood for some moments, pale and rigid. Presently he said:

“The police came to our house to-day.”

My heart felt caught in a steel net pressing it close from all sides, while a mailed hand clutched at my throat.

“They inspected our rooms and measured them,” he went on. “Did they come here too? They will, probably. To find out how many soldiers can be quartered in each house, if mobilisation is ordered.”

The hand released me, the steel net burst, and the wild, avenging beats of my heart stifled me.

“What—what has that got to—to do with——” I gasped. Lucidity pierced on one point alone: his intense gravity had not left him. Indeed, he was so preoccupied as scarcely to notice my condition.

“Mother thought the war had already begun,” Paul went on. “There’s been so much talk about it, you see. She was too frightened to ask what it meant, while they were there, or to understand what they told her; and

she fainted when they had left. A neighbour heard her scream, and went over, and then ran to get me. Father had gone off for the day. When I got home, she was still unconscious. She wasn't alone any more, though. Or perhaps—yes, she was alone. For the—the baby was dead.”

He waited for me to speak. I could not. He began again:

“They hadn't warned me I was to have a brother—or sister. When father came, I met him at the door, and told him. He said only, ‘It is well.’ The baby's death, I suppose. She made him marry her so the child should be legitimate. And I don't think it at all well. There's no baby to provide for; and there mayn't be any war, so the allowance as a soldier's wife doesn't matter. Yet they are married and nothing can change that.”

His resentment against this superfluous marriage was pathetic in its primitive non-morality. I ventured a word about the laws of organised society. Wildly, he burst out in a storm of despair:

“But can't you understand—they treat me, now, as if I were illegitimate! I can't be—can I?—just because father married his mistress? My mother was married to him, and long before I was born; I know, by my birth certificate; and she brought him a *dot*, which he spent. When father ran off with—with the woman who makes me call her mother, he took me too, because he would have his son, he said. I wasn't two years old, and don't remember clearly. I know I hadn't ever cried so much, nor had so many chocolates given me; I was very sick. That's all I know. But I've heard say she wouldn't divorce father, and didn't know how to earn money, and died—very poor.”

“You don't mean she——”

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He did not heed me:

"There's nothing wrong with mother's position any more, so she's making up for lost time, I suppose. And father's position has changed, too. But I can't understand what has gone wrong with my position. I never was her son, and now I don't seem to be his, any longer. Perhaps I belong only to my real mother, and when she died she didn't have a husband. Are you sure I haven't become illegitimate?"

"My dear boy, nothing of the kind can affect you," I said. "This is a civilised country with established laws anybody can verify."

"She doesn't know it, then." His head drooped; his hands lay listlessly beside him.

The events of the afternoon flashed before me. Fresh from such a tragedy as this, worse hung over him, was doubtless in the act of befalling. Nor would a faint intimation of the trouble suffice; I had not the right to spare him.

I found myself in the middle of it, somehow, having had enough sense to present the story impersonally.

Paul listened without showing much surprise, but revealing no emotion at all.

"M. Badajèze had those copies; I have seen them," he observed, when I finished. "I went several times to the château. The footman says the Marquis doesn't like M. Badajèze to go there because he's a Socialist. But other people say he can't be a Socialist, he's too broad in his views. M. Badajèze told us apprentices that the Marquis would not disturb him because he is such a great artist!" Paul smiled. Then his face darkened: "I was to have gone back to-day, after seeing you there. Wish I had. But I was called home instead."

No idea that he might in any way be concerned had yet dawned on him. I, cowardly, fenced with the issue:

"Do you suspect M. Badajèze?"

"Oh, no! Impossible!" he exclaimed, utterly shocked.

"Then—whom?"

"André Manadan."

"On general principles, or for specific reasons?"

"Both."

"Tell me what happened." But instead of letting him do so, as he undoubtedly would, thereby sparing an infinity of pain, I blunderingly admonished him: "You will need proofs before bringing an accusation, you know."

"Accusation!" He stared blankly. "I'm not going to accuse anybody!"

I tried to retrieve my fault:

"Tell me what happened."

"Not if it is to get a comrade into trouble."

"Surely, you don't refuse to tell me?" I urged. "You have never yet refused me anything, Paul."

"I can't get a comrade into trouble."

Then, I broke down.

"Paul, Paul, can't you understand? *You* have been going there by special arrangement—*you* received antique bronzes and brought back imitations—*you* are the one who will be defamed and disgraced, unless another person can be proved guilty!"

He stared at me from a face as cold and fixed and colourless as dull stone. I waited for the desperate outburst which must answer me when he should be able to speak. But his words came, slow and hushed:

"I have done nothing."

"You must prove that."

"I shall try. But I won't betray a comrade."

Had he been less quiet, I might have hoped.

"Don't betray me, then," I said. He quivered, and his eyes widened. Any change in him was welcome. I went on: "This is my affair as well as yours. I have told the Marquis de Vervillers so. You certainly owe me as much comradeship as to a little apprentice. So answer my questions, at least. How long have you known something was wrong?"

"Only now. I'm not a workman, and I didn't notice the pieces save for their design. While you were speaking, I remembered they had felt rather different when I took them back to the château."

"Do you know who went in your stead, to-day?"

"No."

"Were any of the apprentices particularly interested in the bronzes?"

"Yes. M. Badajèze brought his copies out and showed them to us all when he began the restorations; he boasted of his work, declaring only an expert could tell the difference. He said it was all prejudice and snobbishness, that the old ones should be worth a fortune, and his only a few *louis*."

"And one boy especially——" I prompted.

"I don't know; my eyes were all for the bronzes."

"Yet you may have noticed something—at some moment?"

"Nothing I could be absolutely sure of. And I couldn't be a traitor, anyhow," he added doggedly.

"Do you realise that you may be sending yourself to prison?" I groaned.

His muscles stiffened as if frozen, and then relaxed quite limply under the tight-fitting apprentice suit. With arms crossed upon his knees, he bowed his head.

We seemed to be not here in my study at night, but one afternoon, on the hill above Verviller; the world had gone back in its course; Paul had sought me out in my retreat to tell me of his school, and his father, and his desperate resolve; in my ears the words rang: "I would rather be killed than kill poor people."

Like an echo of those words, a veiled, scarcely audible whisper reached me:

"It's better to go to prison than send a comrade there."

V

SILENCE—a mighty silence broken only by the constant rustling which his own hands caused, and the occasional ring of heels upon distant stone. No joy, no colour, no relief about him, as he worked; no tree-shaded market-place with its busy crowd; no light-hearted apprentices to be viewed with admiration or dismay; no Aristide Badajèze to stop in the midst of reprimands and discuss art-principles; no clatter of hammers, no clicking of metals, no whining of files. Paul was reduced to making lamp-shades; one after another, always the same model, the same wires, the same paper of unchanging hues; making lamp-shades from morning until night, quite alone—and in silence.

But he could think. With no one to see or to hear, and with fingers repeating as of themselves the gestures of his monotonous task, Paul could think. His thoughts ran upon scenes which were still very near to him. So near as to be real, and to need no recalling. Then why harp upon it all? Perhaps because of the satiety brought by repetition.

There were five of these scenes; some vivid, some

shrouded; some seared into his eyes, others drumming endlessly in his ears. Five scenes—all real.

I

He was in the streets of Verviller, at night.

The windows of the house he had just left were dark patches in the masonry, save for one—the window to which he had so often raised his boyish eyes. He seemed to ask its light for counsel now, as he might have done of old; but no answer came or could come. In spite of M. Aubret's emotion, Paul knew there could be nothing heroic, no element of self-sacrifice about the attitude he had taken. The problem before him was very simple, as far as others might be concerned; complexity existed only for himself. He must get out of trouble somehow; but to do this, he must perceive the trouble clearly, and he could not. M. Aubret had promised all possible help while agreeing to let Paul act first, and had given him a little money in case of emergencies. But M. Aubret was a gentleman; and there were many things about a workman's life which gentlemen never understood, however nice they might be. So Paul turned away from the house in the rue du Port, having learned of a danger but not of fair means for freeing himself.

The château chimneys rose above the tall, straight-topped walls like heads of slim pines over a level of massive oaks, sharpcut against a half-lighted sky filled with stars. In his first glimpse of Verviller, this château had been one of the objects on which his attention had rested, suggestive of all he must abhor. Many of the great windows shone brightly; the grand salons, of dismal memory, glowered blindly among them. If he could speak to the Marquis, and explain, entreat! But he would not

dare go in; would not be admitted if he tried. Even though the Marquis should happen to come out, he was not sure of the courage to accost him. Yet he waited nearly an hour, with rare shiftings of his weight from one foot to the other, and a periodic quick clasping of his hands, but no further movement. Then—"Why should he listen to me?" Paul asked himself. "I am made to live in a wash-house and work as an apprentice." The reflection contained no bitterness. It was a simple statement of fact.

The four-roomed cottage where his parents and he lived seemed remote and unfamiliar. He looked on it, afraid to approach. An open-hearted talk with his father might help; but his mother would hear. Lights burned in the kitchen and in the ground-floor bedroom; she must be awake, and he reading the paper or asleep over it. Paul must say good-night; but, if father were indeed asleep, he would not wake him.

Paul always began with the scene in the dark streets before those three houses. That was not when circumstances had overwhelmed him. But each detail had played a part he could little suspect.

Bending over the pile of lamp-shades, he counted them. The number was what it should be; and if his thoughts had not stopped, he would not have felt the stiffness of his legs, the aching of his back, the numbness of his hands. Quickly, to think again—to think—to think!

II

He was in the workshop, next morning. Nothing had changed, though the air might have been rather cooler than usual; he shivered once or twice as he took down the

shutters with André Manadan. They two had this duty to perform, and so always arrived first. Paul had come considerably before half-past six, this morning. He had not slept well. But with the bright, crisp sunshine and the normal look of things, his problem had become so illusive that it could scarcely have been said to preoccupy him.

Sleeplessness had not been his reason for coming early. He wanted to take down the shutters alone, and search in one or two hiding-places he knew, provided M. Bada-jèze retired for another quarter of an hour after opening the door, as usual. But André Manadan, impelled by secret motives, had arrived before Paul, who was defeated in the only project he had been able to form. For some moments, Paul drew away from André with a repulsion deeper than ever—the sole evident change in the entire situation. Then his curiosity was roused by noticing that the plausible little wretch, no longer insinuating nor aggressive, had become suspicious and uneasy. The thought of questioning André as possible means for reaching the truth, through a thicket of falsehoods, now occurred to him.

“Was it you they sent to the château yesterday?” Paul asked.

“What’s that to you?” André returned, sulking.

“I’ll answer your question when you have answered mine.”

“And I’ll mind my business when you mind yours.”

“There have been things stolen at the château.” Paul had decided on direct attack.

“Well, you were there at noon.” André had not tried to feign surprise.

“You went later, when I was to have gone.”

“Since you knew, why did you ask?”

"I didn't know, until you gave yourself away. It's you, the thief."

They had spoken rapidly, in whispers. As Paul brought the charge confirmed only by André's lack of surprise, the death-like face with its yellowed eyes drew closer, and the voice snarled raspingly:

"Who are you to talk of thieves? You were caught with me in the Delligny affair. I say so, and you can't prove the contrary."

"If you ever dare say anything like that——" Paul tried to control himself, but was boiling, seething.

"We've stolen together once, and if we're in for it now——"

André got no further. Paul's hands had flown out before he knew what he was doing, and the hollow spans of a double slap resounded in the quiet workshop, followed by a piercing shriek and blatant blubbing.

"If we're in for it now—if we——"

The words whirled round and round in Paul's brain. Why had he struck before listening? For M. Badajèze was upon them, bouncing out of the house while Mademoiselle Odette stopped in the doorway, scared and scandalised.

"What's this? Fighting on my premises? A big boy a saulting a little one!" cried out M. Badajèze. "Do you take my workshop for a waggoners' eating-house?"

"Oh, it's little André! Is he hurt? Do bring him to me, papa!" wailed Mademoiselle Odette. "Don't leave him alone with that boy! It's the second time Paul has attacked André!"

"I never attacked him before! I only swore at him!" Paul protested stormily. "You can't imagine all I have had to put up with!"

"If you were larger, you might defend yourself," sneered

M. Badajèze. "Here, take the boy Manadan, Odette; see if he is hurt. As for yourself, young man, let me ever catch you at such games again, and either your father shall thrash you or I am capable of doing it myself!"

Paul had subsided. He accepted the rebuff with bowed head and crimson face. He had remembered that no explanation was possible. For he could not say André had accused him of complicity in two thefts. Mademoiselle Odette put her arm round Paul's "victim" and led him away; by some mysterious process he was suffering acutely in his chest and left knee. Within the house, Paul heard the farce continue. Manadan wept and complained by turns; it was as if he had been kicked up to the ceiling, and then laid on the anvil and stuck with files, to judge by the commotion which he and his sympathisers made. Mademoiselle Odette recommended to her father, who had rejoined them, that the poor, maltreated lad be allowed to go home. M. Badajèze agreed; he had small liking for illness, but what he abhorred most was an idle, snivelling boy.

With rage in his heart, and fear at his throat—for he had had leisure to ponder over his graver difficulties—Paul bent at the table, polishing a key which was his allotted first task of the morning.

There was a sound of stealthy rummaging in a corner. Footsteps crept one way and another. "Hunting for his things," Paul thought, not deigning to look round. Suddenly he was struck in the curve of the back, full upon the spine, and his coat was jerked from his left shoulder. Even a weak fist can cause sharp pain under such conditions; but from the traces noted afterwards, and interpreted differently, it became evident at least to Paul that a stick or a bar had been used.

As Paul, suffering cruelly, tried to straighten up, André shot out through the front door. Neither M. Badajèze nor Mademoiselle Odette was visible.

"Hello—what's up? What's he got now?" voices cried in several tones. The other apprentices had come in from the Place du Vieux Marché.

Paul swayed from side to side, clinging to the edge of the work-table and repressing all sounds save low moans.

"Struck his back against the table!" "Dropped his key and stooped to pick it up!" "Happened to me, once—hurts dreadfully!" the apprentices exclaimed.

"Serves him right," M. Badajèze pronounced, entering. "Take that key and finish it, Ernest. I'll give him massage for his injured back." And he ordered Paul to the bellows, while he put some iron on the forge.

Dizzy from pain and nervous shock, and with thoughts hopelessly blurred in his heavy head, Paul pulled at the bellows, keeping his position, as he stooped and rose, thanks to the big handles on which he hung blindly. Several times he fancied himself losing consciousness, but stuck to the task.

There must have been steps which Paul had failed to hear; for M. Badajèze dropped the iron-work, and spoke in his most urbane tone:

"Ah, M. le Marquis! Good-morning. These are early hours for you. Shall we go into my parlour to talk, or do you enjoy this atmosphere of art?"

"Your parlour, if you please," said the Marquis de Vervillers.

Releasing the handles, and steadying himself against the wall, Paul looked for something—he was not sure what. Perhaps that key, which Ernest had long since finished. A moment later, he was sitting on the ground in a heap. No one observed him. The *compagnon*

had gone out with one of the boys, and the others were very busy working or trifling. Principally the latter, since M. Badajèze and Mademoiselle Odette were both absent. Perhaps Paul fainted; at all events he had not moved again, and some time must have elapsed, when M. Badajèze yelled thunderously:

“PAUL CLERMONT!”

Paul always stopped abruptly there. This scene ran into the next. Yet he ended it when he heard his name called, and, stumbling to his feet, reeled towards the parlour and a fate which even then he did not conceive.

His eyes left the lamp-shades to seek the small window high above his head. The hour had nearly come for a ray of sun to shine through. Every day he watched, patiently, for that ray to visit him. It brought a feeling almost as if the sun itself had peeped in. When the weather was fair, he saw the sun as he walked in the yard. But the thought that it came to him in his room—almost—was wonderfully cheering.

III

He was in M. Badajèze's parlour. Not the dining-room which opened into the shop; M. Badajèze had met him there, and caught him by one ear, and drawn him on, through a tiny hall, into the parlour, where there were curtains and a carpet and like luxuries. The Marquis stood near a window, very erect, superbly elegant, and unapproachably dignified.

“Persuasion, not violence, M. Badajèze,” the Marquis commanded. “And remember my two chief objects.”

“Kindness would be wasted on this,” growled the artistic locksmith, pushing the boy from him an instant before releasing the captive ear.

"Let me speak first," the Marquis said. "I want you to tell me, young man, if you know why I am here."

Paul started to say Yes. Of course he knew, thanks to M. Aubret's warning. But the admission might compromise him. He hung his head and did not speak.

"Will you answer, unhappy good-for-nothing?" roared M. Badajèze.

"You would do better to be frank with me," the Marquis continued, his tone developing a tinge of severity. "I shall be indulgent if your attitude makes this possible. Come! Do you acknowledge knowing what has happened at the château?"

Paul thought: "He asks me to be frank, and he is right." Looking up, he said:

"Yes, I know."

"A confession! A full confession! Cursed be the hour when I admitted such a villain into my establishment!" howled the locksmith, clapping his huge red hands to his round bald head.

"Leave him alone, M. Badajèze.—If you restore my property, it will make a vast difference for you," the Marquis went on.

Paul spoke slowly and waveringly:

"You think I stole your bronzes. I didn't. I don't know where they are. I don't know anything, except what M. Aubret told me. All I did was to put in place the bronzes M. Badajèze gave me."

A scream like that of a wounded beast escaped the artistic locksmith. When fury allowed him to speak, he caught Paul by his coat:

"What, miserable one! You would accuse *me*?"

Something fell from Paul's pocket with a metallic ring.

"But—here we have it!" cried M. Badajèze. "Caught with the goods, M. le Marquis! Caught with the goods!"

It was, indeed, a dainty bit of Louis XV bronze-work, all roses and love-knots, as applied to mirrors in Pompadour days of amorous rhapsodies.

The Marquis took it from the trembling fingers of M. Badajèze.

"Yes. My original. Admirably restored, but I can identify the work by the touch and the gilding. Excellently done." The amateur had forgotten Paul. He resumed: "We must have him searched. Perhaps the other——"

"No time like the present, in dealing with such characters," said the locksmith. "If you move, little thief, I'll flatten you against the wall with my two fists, and then tie you up like a parcel for shipment to China!"

"Commit no irregularity," the Marquis admonished.

"Has he not robbed a client of mine and in my own establishment? Can I let him escape with the spoils?" the artistic locksmith almost sobbed. "No, worse luck! His pockets are empty, save for this handkerchief and a folding ruler and two or three coppers. But—what is this in his purse?—Ten francs in gold!"

Since the moment when the mirror-piece had fallen, Paul had stood dumb and inanimate. He did not know how it came there. What could he say? And no one asked him to say anything. Now they wanted to take his money—the money given him against emergencies——

"It's mine!" he cried.

"*Yours?* You never came by this honestly!" Aristide Badajèze turned to the Marquis: "The boy is allowed no money. His father has told me so. He sold your other bronze for ten francs. We have caught him doubly.

With your permission, M. le Marquis, I shall send for the police."

"M. Aubret gave me the money last night—go ask him," Paul said thickly. He could not control his voice, and could scarcely hear it, for the surging blood in his head. "As for the bronze, I don't know how it came in my pocket." He made a despairing gesture, which brought on more acutely the pain in his back. His coat, partly wrenched off by M. Badajèze in the course of the search, dragged on his shoulder, as when he had been injured.

But this explained everything to him. André Manadan had struck him to slip the thing in his pocket, after rooting it out from some corner.

"Yes!" Paul exclaimed. "I know how it came there!"

"Tell me, then," said the Marquis.

The impulse was already dead. Had he not said he would go to prison rather than send a comrade there? It was true he had not realised what all this meant. None the less he was pledged.

"Somebody—somebody must have put it there," Paul murmured.

The Marquis drew a step nearer:

"Return that other bronze to me, and I shall spare you as far as possible. I give you my word."

"I can't return what I have never had," Paul said miserably.

"A difficult case," the Marquis sighed.

"Not if handled with sufficient energy, M. le Marquis," the locksmith retorted. "I promise you I know how to treat young criminals."

A voice seemed to speak within Paul. As if a friend whispered close to his ear, saying: "Appeal to the Mar-

quis's humanity. Speak out from your heart—let him understand what this means to you."

The words he uttered could not have been very convincing. He got badly tangled, avoiding accusations against Manadan. But in that maze of vague, peculiar evidence, the Marquis must have seen glimmerings of truth. For he said:

"This affair is to go no further. I shall trust to luck for the recovery of my bronze."

"Then I take up the case where you abandon it!" declared the artistic locksmith. "It shall not be said that an apprentice of Aristide Badajèze can steal with impunity. If the nobility grows lax in its ideas of public morals, the world of art is still their bulwark. I presume that at least M. le Marquis de Vervillers will not deny me his testimony?"

"Should this be brought before the public, I must support law and order," the Marquis said sadly. "You will reflect before you act, I hope; and if you wish to consult with me, I am at your disposal."

He put the bronze in his pocket.

"I must ask you to leave that with me," said M. Badajèze. "It is safe in *my* hands—provided you don't again order me to trust it to some one else. You will be kind enough to recall, M. le Marquis, that you forbade me to come with my work, and instructed me to send this very boy who robbed you."

"Take the bronze." The Marquis handed it to him without looking; he turned to Paul: "Young man, you may go.—I had him called, M. Badajèze. Let him go."

As the Marquis finished, Paul drew himself together and bolted from the parlour—across the dining-room—through the workshop—out into the street.

Paul left his task for a moment, to take up an earthenware jug which stood near the bed. His throat always got dry, at the end of this scene.

On his bench once more, he counted the lamp-shades. He was ahead of the required number. It did him good to rehearse all this; it kept him thinking, and helped his fingers to go rapidly.

IV

He was in the streets, but by day—running in the streets of Verviller. Apprentice-fashion, he had worn his cap when called from the workshop; and, terrified beyond thinking, had not taken it off. Nobody noticed it in the house; and because of it, nobody noticed him as he ran.

Panting, yet ice-cold, he reached the house in the rue du Port. A stranger opened the door. What did he want? Speak to M. Aubret?—

“It will be many a day before any one speaks to him. Picked up unconscious in the night. At his age——”

Clinging to walls and halting at all street-corners, exhausted, his courage gone, his resistance destroyed, his back seeming broken in two, Paul reached home. His father was there, with M. Badajèze; his mother screamed out from her bedroom beyond the narrow hall. They had heard the story, then. As Paul entered, his father seized him by the collar of his drill jacket, holding him off at arm’s length.

“It is I who shall have him boxed up, before he disgraces my name further!” cried the wasted man, to whom righteous anger had lent physical strength and mental resolution. “*That* my son? I disown him!”

And he pushed the boy from him.

Paul rolled limply into a corner and stayed there, motionless.

It seemed to him that he was seated on a bundle of rags at the gate of a hovel from which he had been turned, a wanderer on the face of the earth. Any who had heeded his lips would have caught a whisper—

“In the offal! Cast out in the offal!”

Paul’s work had stopped. The shortest of the scenes, it had broken upon him with extraordinary brutality. That his father should renounce him when M. Aubret failed, was a disaster crowning what had gone before, and leaving no hope anywhere. Without home or refuge, a reformatory might be as good a place as another—and better than a railway van.

Of their own accord, his fingers sought a lamp-shade. His eyes were riveted anxiously on the little opening in the heavy barred door. A guard’s round must be due. Light as the foot-fall was, his ear, trained to the sound, caught it.

An ugly face peered in; hard, searching eyes scanned the young inmate’s features and counted the lamp-shades. The loop-hole was clicked into place; the footsteps passed on.

Paul wearily dropped his work, looking up and round the bleak walls. The sun had not sent its shaft of light, to-day. He wished he had chosen brush-making. When it came to counting by hundreds, brushes must be less tedious, because not so gaudy and fragile. These colours flashed and blinded; and the paper soiled easily.

Still one scene to recall. The work began again.

v

He was before a judge famous for penetrating the corrupted heart of youth.

Dully, Paul answered questions put to him. No, he

was not guilty. Yes, he had handled the bronzes. No, he could not positively declare whether they were genuine or not. No, he could not explain why he had put copies in place at the château, whereas another boy, sent in his stead, had delivered the originals entrusted to him. And so on, and so on. What could all this matter? Why so much talking, and to so little purpose? It was all very simple, if they could be made to understand. What did any of the facts advanced against him amount to, if taken singly? But where people would not understand. . . . It was all very hazy and involved, as Paul rather heard than saw.

The facts brought together by the righteous Badajèze, bent on defending honesty in the name of art, were truly impressive by their number and breadth of interpretation. Not an act nor a word of Paul's during that week but assumed importance. Every event of that last night and last morning was capital, of course. His watching before M. Aubret's house (after provoking a heart-seizure), and before the château (meditating a return of the stolen pieces); his slipping up to bed without seeing his father (fear of being questioned as to his movements); his coming early to the shop, his assaulting Manadan, his hurting his own back (while trying to conceal the stolen bronze under the work-table); finally his being caught with one article and with the money whose existence could be explained only by the sale of the other bronze (he had made sure M. Aubret's illness was serious, before alleging the ten francs came from him):—so the case was pieced out.

Night crept close. Paul no longer saw to work. The rustling of his fingers ceased. All sounds in the corridor had been hushed.

Upon him and his comrades in misery, each individually alone, weighed collectively the mighty Silence.

VI

PAUL told me of these scenes, and of his life and thought during these months. As he talked, he sat in his favourite place on my ottoman; or rather, he half reclined there, for his strength had not returned. Still quite pale and with listless eyes, he would try to smile, at times, but betrayed the effort it cost him. His lithe figure had lengthened, and he seemed all the taller because his shoulders had not broadened. I had supplied him with subjects other than his recent experiences; but nothing in the way of books or anecdotes or outside amusements was worth the freedom to sit or to recline as he pleased in that spot of his olden choice, and to talk by way of atonement for his almost endless silence.

We were not seeing each other, as before, at odd hours scattered throughout the course of a week or a month. He was not a visitor, nor an apprentice, nor a waif at anybody's mercy. He had become my Paul.

"When the doors clanged after us, it was as if I had been waked up suddenly," he said. "Everything was so unreal, you know. It hadn't been as if I myself was acting. But it came back gradually, when I was alone in my cell."

His fate had been settled before I reached the convalescent stage after emotion had provoked an attack of gout in my throat, threatening the heart, rendering me helpless and useless, bringing me near my end. Though I set adequate lawyers on the trail and found ready coöperation on the part of the Marquis, who had been stirred by Paul's appeal and asked no better than to believe him

innocent, yet there were awkward obstacles. The task might have proved simpler if Paul had been condemned for felony under ordinary rules; the very measures of accommodation adopted in his behalf, to save him from the penitentiary colony, magnified the complexity of his position and multiplied our difficulties. My detectives traced the missing bronze to the rag-shop where the veritable thief had disposed of it; but meanwhile, André Manadan had disappeared. Shred by shred I had to gather evidence against him, while destroying that against Paul.

The Marquis de Vervillers had refused to prosecute; but the artistic locksmith had persisted in championing the fair fame of the proletariat as besmirched by his apprentice; and the father, while weeping and imploring that his son be spared the infamy of a prison, would not shelter a thief in his home. That this was the woman's doing, I never doubted.

The Magistrate was not convinced on certain points, and summoned two "morality witnesses" on Paul's behalf. The first, Delligny, was in such fear of the law that no clear expression of opinion or of recollection could be drawn from him; the second, Marcel Lavenue, tempestuously asserted his friend's innocence, but flew into a passion when he found his word doubted, got irretrievably tangled in judicial hair-splitting between ideas and occurrences, and was finally ejected ignominiously for rude remarks about the law.

No choice remained, then; the Magistrate exercised clemency in discarding the suggestion of a penitentiary colony; and Paul was consigned temporarily to an establishment for youth with dangerous tendencies who were not yet criminals.

When securing his release, I stipulated with his parents

that I should be allowed to keep him, to educate him and bring him up as my own. They hesitated, warning me that they would not be held responsible for what might occur in my house or elsewhere; I think they had veritably worked themselves up to the point of accepting him as a dangerous character. But the father said at last that he would not stand in the way of what I represented as being the future of his son.

"The clanging of the doors woke me," Paul said. "Everything had been as dreadful before, but not so real, you see. Now I knew I was locked, chained, bolted in. I was a prisoner, not much better than a convict. And I hadn't done anything!"

Under the influence of time or disuse, his voice had deepened; no longer a boy's, almost a young man's voice. But those last words were spoken as a boy—"And I hadn't done anything!"—faintly, thinly, yet with oh! such tragic unconsciousness of a faith accepting, because needs must, even what is most wrong with the world. I covered my eyes with one hand. "Am I tiring you?" he asked, quickly solicitous. I shook my head. "Then I may go on? It's a relief." "Go on," I murmured. And he went on, the young man speaking.

After the doors had closed, he stood in a line with other boys. All were still as when they had left home, or shop, or the street—and in a few minutes they were to change. Some were working-boys, some seemed of better fortune, a few were ragged and disreputable; as for him, he wore his apprentice suit of drill. Most of the boys had evil faces, either recalling André Manadan or else belonging to the criminal type.

"They reminded me of the vagabonds of the railway

vans," said Paul. "I tried to tell myself that they too might give a crust to some old woman cast out in the offal."

He noticed one, standing just before him in the line, whose offence could not have lain deeper than weakness, and so might have consisted of anything. Paul, in all his life, had never owned such fine clothes. The face was very pale and drawn, with heavy rings under the eyes; this boy had suffered morally, whereas the others were sullen, rebellious, dangerous, steeled against sensitiveness. There was a mute appeal in his blue eyes directed towards any official who drew near. He could not ask for release, so he must have craved to be understood in that which he himself would have been at loss to explain.

"His father is surely of a good family—as you are, or as my father used to be," Paul commented. "And I said to myself, 'We are here together, for all that.'"

They were measured, and described, and photographed, and the details noted down in books; they became distinguishable no longer as units, but as types. They took it all very hard—as if this was what made the difference!

He paused. Then:

"It did matter, though. You see, they had the notion they must resent everything, and they began with the outward signs."

Paul had then taken the first step towards philosophy in his life to come, the step that was to set the pace for inner development. The stability of his character, the sweetness of his nature, were at stake. And he saved them by the swift, intuitive resolution, applied to material details, that he would not rebel uselessly.

His eyes, listless a few moments before, regained their glow as they watched me, earnest, searching, fascinated.

The light faded, and he was again listless when he spoke.

The first days were not the hardest. He had his new trade to learn, the regulations to observe, the guards to conciliate if possible. This gave much occupation to his thoughts. By a concentrated effort of will, he fought off depression and despair. If he yielded to those, he would be fit for nothing when he came out. The term of delivery could not be very remote. Should M. Aubret recover, it might come soon; otherwise there might be hope from the Marquis; or from his father and M. Badajèze, but only if André Manadan were caught.

"You don't mean—" I interrupted him—"that you could bear to think of them at this period? Or not calmly, as you are speaking now? Surely, some bitterness——"

Why bitterness? he asked. His surprise at my suggestion was deep.

"Once I had started to let them punish me, it was too late to stop," he said simply. "Why should I blame anybody for that? What I think of Manadan is what I thought then, and that was what I knew before ever hearing of M. Badajèze. No, I had to turn my back on ugly thoughts, and say, 'I've helped to put myself here; and now I'm caught and caged, I can only harm myself by fighting.' That was my idea. Vague and general when I stood in line with the rest, after the doors closed on us. But I had plenty of leisure to work it out, in a solitary cell with scarcely a sound to remind me there was anybody but myself in the world."

Individually alone and collectively in silence. That was the principle regulating their existence. Young outcasts of society, degraded by ill-doing or evil thinking of various

sorts and in all measures short of actual crime, they had to be spared corrupting contacts.

Paul's conventional notions of crime had been gathered at school and in the workshop, or from newspapers, or by listening to street-talk. He had never been able to establish any just balance between accident and premeditation, between the committing of an act or being checked by forces beyond one's command. The moral question was simple enough; so was the world's method of retribution; only, the two did not agree.

What counted first in the measuring out of punishment seemed to be whether or not one had committed the act, and secondly, whether one had planned it. So a boy who ran away from home three or four times a month, but returned repentant whenever starvation threatened, was more moral than a confirmed but inoffensive vagabond living by his wits the year round. So a boy who impulsively pilfered gilt jewellery or cheap perfumes and pomatum at a village fair was preferable to one who could eat only after plundering vegetable-stalls and chicken-houses. So a boy who systematically beat his mother and sisters as part of the day's work, having no father, was less reprehensible than a precocious bandit who, carried away by drunken fury, knifed a comrade whom he had previously threatened under like conditions. The ostensible purpose of isolation in penitentiary establishments and reformatories was to prevent the second of each category from corrupting the first. According to such standards, Paul, considered guilty of planning a theft and secretly disposing of the spoils, was a dangerous law-breaker capable of corrupting fellow-convicts who had acted accidentally, though repeatedly. Paul could not believe this; no more could he believe that running away

and repenting when convenient was better than a frank policy of vagabondage, nor thieving from vanity more respectable than stealing to live. It was all hard to balance in one's judgment, and not pleasant to think about. Yet it kept returning constantly, without ever bringing its answer. Perhaps many here were neither guiltier nor less moral than he. Or at least, perhaps they had not been. For now—now something in the faces he saw terrified him, and something else revolted him.

With most of the boys, he had no standard of comparison; but he caught occasional glimpses of faces seen on entering. The change—one of two changes—had come over them all. He could read it in their expressions, one change or the other, creeping over their faces, gnawing into their hearts, and identifying them with one of two types into which all were divided who had dwelt long within these walls and bars. He knew that it must be hanging over him, too; thought its beginning might be already there, in his face which he could never see, but which others saw—as he saw theirs.

Because at times they would catch fleeting glimpses of one another, these young reprobates who lived in beneficent silence on the road, high or low, towards conventional morality. When hurried, singly, through the long corridors, they might seize, in a nightmarish way, an impression of a face peering through a tiny barred trap in the door of a cell—a face of hatred and vengeance, or a face of cowering fear. Those were the moral categories into one or the other of which the beneficiaries of the establishment were reformed—hatred and vengeance, or cowering fear.

Once, Paul thought he recognised the boy who, on entering, had most reminded him of André Manadan. His,

was the hatred and vengeance. Again, he knew he recognised the tall, nice boy, the son of a gentleman—perhaps. His, was the cowering fear.

A species of grey, lifeless lifting of the darkness, bringing no sham semblance of light, would wake him each morning before the guard came the rounds. It was as if he had slept only while night pressed upon him with irresistible weight; though merciful weariness of body and dullness of mind had in reality stifled consciousness. But when night drew away its covering, he would rouse at once, suddenly, completely, aware of every ache in his form caused by work the day before, of every discouraging thought which had flitted through his brain since he had lost his liberty and forfeited the respect of men. With body, limbs, and head flat against his hard pallet, his eyes would stare vacantly towards the dismal mockery of sun-rays reflected back and forth by so many grim walls that they had lost all joy or life.

Then the key would grind in the lock and a guard would stand sternly, half-opening the door as if expecting to be attacked. The guards did not like him, and Paul did not at first know why. He came gradually to believe it was because he resisted promptings of hate, and felt no fear. Always ready to repress violence, they trusted only those who cowered. Paul was gradually understanding why those boys who did not rage and snarl like beasts, and snap at any who neared their doors, had no choice but to shrink into corners, and keep their eyes shiftily lowered. But still he sank to neither category; still he avoided hatred and vengeance, or cowering fear; still he remained the old Paul—with heart and soul yearning for release to come while some remnants of himself endured.

The opening door was the signal for each boy to leave his cell. Through the bleak corridor, following a curved sweep which made it appear endless, he passed with a guard close behind. To the right were windows through which he could see nothing save sheer walls and barred windows; to the left, doors whose small, cage-like openings, with ominous heads sometimes peering out, he would fain have forgotten. Little chance to look or not to look, however; if he hesitated, raised his lowered brow, or even seemed to slip his eyes sideways, a premonitory growl would reach him, then a mumbled threat, and a hand stretched out to enforce the majesty of law. The real temptation did not come from right or left, however. It came from far behind or far before, where sounds of other steps rang dimly through the silence.

One after another, at stated distances, they threaded the long, curved corridors; went down winding stone steps within an iron cage. A sharp, accidental noise would break the rhythm—as of a foot slipping, followed by a thud; then as it were a hole of silence where that unwonted noise had been.

As each boy reached a certain door, he was expected to run out into a tiny, high-walled court, pause at a faucet, quickly wet his face and hands, and run on to a door beyond. The whole had been so organised that no two boys should ever meet; at most they could catch, in long corridors or winding stairs, distant glimpses of prison-suits and lowered heads. But any laxness in the performance of these summary rites might disturb the order of march and cause boys to come together. Paul, having washed his arms and neck too, was actually found with his head in the water, and learned that such liberties were inadmissible. He, the scrupulously clean one, came to

consider that a dash of water over face and hands sufficed. Indeed, if it had not been for the snatch of air and the brief brisk run, and the grateful coolness of these drops straight from the earth, he might have judged this toilet elaborate for such a residence.

Going back to their cells by other passages, always in the same direction so as never to cross, they were set to their work, and the monotony of the day began.

If they had given no cause for grave complaint, they might pace narrow strips of cemented court with high walls all round. Raising their eyes, they could see the sky, but also the prison windows, whatever the way they looked. When first turned out here, boys yearned towards the sky. But it was too far away to help them; and before seeing it, they had to remember the prison whence this sadly relative escape had been sanctioned for a bare half-hour; also they met the eyes of guards seated above the partitions, holding all the wedge-like courts in view, jealous for their authority, bored by the monotony of their task, happy for the relief of breaches detected in the prison discipline. No, there was nothing good to see when one's eyes had been raised. Under the effect of nearer and more tangible suggestions, the smooth smug heavens became a mockery. Thereafter the boys, with sagging heads and rounded shoulders, would swing heavily back and forth, with shuffling feet, not looking, not caring.

Hearing one another's steps yet cut off by impenetrable walls, they were forbidden any attempt at intercourse. Should a sole scratch the paving, should a step linger an instant in its beat, should a body sway an inch too near the masonry, sharp reprimand came, or swift punishment. Yet they managed to talk after a fashion, these young outcasts vowed to silence. Paul learned to know the

cadence of sundry footsteps, and developed a certain friendship for them, though the signals made were beyond his talents of interpretation. To escape the guards' attention, they had to be subtle indeed. Paul, too, developed a special gait. Or he seemed to develop it. His was a desperate effort to maintain the gait of days when he had been free.

In his cell for all other hours of light or of darkness, he worked practically without respite as long as a vestige of greyness lingered within his walls. To forget his fate, and to keep a grasp upon his faculties, he would repeat those scenes which had been preludes to disaster. Not a very congenial subject, one might be tempted to believe. Better than none, however; and he could fix his attention thus when everything else escaped him.

Insensibly, he drifted away from those scenes, turning to themes and pictures more remote. Schooldays in Verviller appealed to him, and especially childish memories of Arnan. But hours came when no scene could control his thoughts nor still the flutters of his heart. Then, it was phrases he would repeat. With fingers tightly closed round a frail wire, clinging to it in his bewildered desolation as he might have gripped a spar swayed above an angry hungry ocean, he repeated phrases which came as if whispered to him.

"Courage—Patience—Right Doing and Thinking."

"Calm is the thread by which our finest moments connect us with the God of Nature."

Calm was what he most needed, and found most difficult to preserve. It was as if the turmoil of inner storms must atone for the noiselessness beneath whose vacuum his health, his will, his character, the very essence of his being were perishing slowly, relentlessly away.

Paul left the ottoman and came close to me, resting one hand on my chair. He quivered slightly.

"There is another sentence I used to hear in the night, when I couldn't bear anything any longer." His voice was so low and tremulous that I strained to listen. "*Remember at all times, in all places, that you are part of All Time and All Space.*"

He looked down upon me very earnestly:

"That thought saved me from falling so far that even you could not have rescued me."

VII

I HAD asked Paul to go on some errand; simple enough and not requiring much time or attention. The reluctance which he did not seek to hide drew very near to refusal. Was it possible, I wondered, that one whose nature had been so genuine and character so sound throughout his young years, one who had stayed so steadfastly unspoiled in recent ordeals of body and soul, could be changed by a short prosperity?

He stood before me in a becoming suit of brown cheviot, well-cut and perfectly fitted; his brown shoes and hose were neat and showed good ankles; his collar and tie were impeccable. The attitude he had unconsciously taken proved that he had been born to wear such clothes; his movements were freer than before but equally graceful. Apart from such changes, one could note that, always good-looking, he had grown handsome; while the eyes, the mouth, the expression, were still those of Paul.

"Very well," I said. "You need not trouble yourself. I shall go."

A gasp of deep pain parted his lips and caused his nostrils to widen.

"Oh, it's not *that!*" he exclaimed. "If you wouldn't mind giving me the money——"

"We need not discuss it further. And now I wish to work."

"But with the money——"

"You know I have an account there," I said. "All you had to do was to go ask for the paper and bring it home."

The pink which had been returning faintly to his cheeks, like a distant reflection of his once bright colours, fled and left him very pale.

"I didn't want to worry you." His voice was dull and low. "But perhaps I ought to explain. There's not a shop in Verviller where they would trust me."

Shocked out of thought or word, I fixed my eyes on him. He went on:

"For everybody here except you and Marcel—and perhaps the Marquis—I'm a thief released during good behaviour."

"Who—who dares say such things?" I rasped brokenly.

"Nobody. It isn't necessary. They look it and act it."

"Are you not over-sensitive?" I asked. "If no one has said such things—if you are judging by looks and manner——"

"Remember that André Manadan has not been caught," Paul observed quietly. "They know there's been theft, and they must hold a culprit. That's natural."

"Do they forget me?" I thundered.

No. It was I who had forgotten myself. I knew it as soon as that question, which remained unanswered, had escaped me. In the selfishness of a studious life, I had never thought of showing myself with the boy. We had been out together, certainly, but in the unostentatious

way suited to my tastes; I had not imposed him on his fellow-citizens.

Paul was the first to speak:

"I'm sorry to have worried you about it. Your whole morning's work is spoiled."

"My work be——"

I don't know whether respect for Paul or remorse for my work's sake checked me. At all events, I found a more useful direction for energy. Writing two notes, I told him to deliver them at once. The first introduced M. Paul Clermont to my stationer, stating that he was authorised to buy whatever he pleased there and have it charged to me. The second, addressed to Lavenue's stables, ordered a carriage for the afternoon.

When he had gone, I wrote to Frère Alexandre, inviting him to lunch with us both. This note I entrusted to Léonie for the post. I did so without trepidation. For the marvel of marvels was that Paul had completely won her heart.

After an hour's drive through the streets of Verviller, stopping at several prominent shops which I entered leaning on Paul's arm, we went out into the country, for he had asked to see his grandfather.

The cottage, squeezed within a yard or two of a dusty road, did not look the abode of all delights he had described. The tavern garden across the way did not appear either vast or entrancingly beautiful. Paul himself commented upon this:

"They must have sold more than half their garden. It used to be much bigger."

"Yet the trees, which you told me stood at the end, are still there," I was cruel enough to object.

"That's been puzzling me," he said quite simply. "Anyhow, it used to be better kept. Run to weed and seed, now. Our cottage is neglected, too. Grandfather and grandmother are both old; they don't care much, any more."

The carriage drew up. A small, frail old man, with watery eyes blinking in the sun, and slightly bowed knees held rigidly, watched us with melancholy, incurious gaze.

"It's not worth while introducing grandfather," Paul said with his practical downrightness. "He couldn't talk to you."

Paul sprang out, and I drove on. It had been understood that I should call for him in half an hour. I wanted to see the woods where he had played as a child.

Tree-stumps, barren stretches, and weather-stained rocks were all that I found; and the landscape offered nothing in other directions. I told the coachman to go slowly back towards Arnan.

The village was not yet in sight when Paul landed in his seat beside me, having taken a flying jump from the road.

"Let's drive on, if you don't mind," he said excitedly. "We had nowhere else to go to, had we?"

Telling him to give the coachman any orders he chose, I surveyed him.

Evidently, he had run fast; his breath came quickly, his face was stained with dust and perspiration. As for his clothes, they were mottled brown and grey, and somewhat rumpled; his hat—a new straw—he carried in one hand, it was broken out of shape as if several people had stepped in it. Beneath this outward disorder, I noted restrained exhilaration.

Was his grandfather well? I asked. He answered Yes. I did not insist.

When we reached the crest of the Ripote, he said:

"May we stop? You will think me silly—but I should like to sit where we were that day, three years ago."

This idea of his impressed me, and may explain why, as I stepped from the carriage, I noticed vividly what lay before me—familiar features to which I had never given much thought. The dome-shaped hill-top, with its roads winding up to the crest from either side; the woods in the direction away from town, where the level of the summit curved gently down; the woods lying towards town, where the earth rose yet slightly before reaching the swift decline; the road itself, hemmed in by ditches, one not much more than ankle-deep, the other, towards Verviller, scarcely knee-deep, but spanned by a rustic foot-bridge or cart-way, five or six logs side by side on two transversal pieces:—was it because of Paul's mood that I saw so vividly, or was the scene itself seeking to whisper the tragedy destined soon to break this peace with uproar, to steep this soil in blood?

We took our old places on the edge of the crest beyond the last trees, with Verviller and the plain of the Mareille beneath us. The sun was still high enough for that landscape to be simply, unsuggestively beautiful.

"I should like to talk to you about my future," he began. "You are sure you don't mind my staying with you?"

"It is my wish that you should never leave me, Paul."

The radiant, wondering smile dawned for the first time since we had been brought together again.

"I shall never leave you. And I want to be educated. But I can't do more than go to night-school." After a moment's pause, he added: "You see, I must work for you."

"Work for me! My dear boy, don't you understand that I am pledged to your father to supply you with both an education and a career? I don't want your work. I want you!"

His expression increased the earnestness of his words as he began again:

"It's because I belong to you that I must work. Boys always have to work for their parents. Only, I don't know what trade to choose. You wouldn't wish me to go in an office, would you? And apprenticeship is long and costs money. M. Badajèze won't take me back." His voice sank and his head drooped slightly: "I went and asked him."

Exposed to such a rebuff which he had concealed! And as I shrank from the idea, a double picture flashed before me. On one panel I saw myself introducing to Verviller society the eminently presentable young man beside me. On the other, I saw him in apprentices' blue drill, holding a hammer and standing at a forge which spat sparks and vomited smoke over the entire neighbourhood.

"I have enough money for both of us," I said, "and your plan is not only unnecessary but it would defeat mine. When you are educated, you shall be absolutely free to choose the career you please. Meanwhile, can't you trust my judgment?"

His air reminded me of the mystery at Arnan, even before he said:

"Grandfather didn't recognise me."

Without feigning surprise himself, he stopped as if expecting me to be surprised. To please him, I pretended. Astonishment on my part might have been genuine, if he had announced the old man had indeed recognised him.

"They must have told him I was dead," he went on.

"When I went up and said, 'Grandfather, it's Paul!'—he shook his head and started to cry. I told him once more that I was myself. 'Yes, yes!' he said. 'And there's another over in the gooseberry bushes, yonder. Always there, when he isn't here or in the woods with his mother.' Then he laughed, tears raining down his face, and talked of things that happened years and years ago." Paul swallowed hard. "I thought he'd gone mad. But he knew grandmother was off for the day, in the next village. So I told myself, 'He is sane, but thinks me dead. If what they believe were true, it would be better that way.' He did say, once: 'Paul is dead.' But a minute later he was talking about the woods and the gooseberry bushes."

"As he had reminded me of the garden—and I hadn't forgotten—I went over to look at it. There wasn't anybody at the inn, and I just walked through. There *was* a boy in the bushes and shrubs and things; working, not playing. And the boy wasn't Paul, but André Manadan."

I sprang up. In spite of old limbs and aching joints, I swear that I sprang up.

"And you let him run away? You didn't——"

Paul waited, unmoved, until I should finish. His attitude disarmed and shamed me.

"Go on," I commanded sharply, sitting down. My movements were slow and painful, this time.

"Run away?" Paul said with a tinge of scorn. "He wouldn't know how. Even to dodge arrest, he didn't have brains or courage to go any farther than this, and stupidly chose a place I talked about very often. He had with him a pocket-book he'd picked up or stolen, with the papers of an orphan in it; his legs gave out at Arnan, and he asked for work as kitchen and garden boy. The people of the

inn thought his papers all right; he was never shy about lying, you know; the description came as near fitting him as it would any stunted boy of his age with overgrown hair and an average form of face; and his handwriting being as illegible as the signature he imitated, there was nothing to give him away."

"Such a nature as his volunteered all this information?" I could not help asking.

"No, I had to beat it out of him," Paul replied cheerfully. "He knew I must remember that ugly blow in the back, so he raised his spade as soon as he saw me. I knocked it out of his hand, and he tried to kick me with his heavy nailed boot. It's funny, the sort of courage cowardice gives people when they've got a weapon and you haven't. I dodged, then ducked and rammed him with my head full in the chest. Always had a hard head, you know. Knocked him flat. For a while, he only blubbered in answer to my questions. Then he told me a straight story, I fancy. I warned him I'd give him another beating for every lie I caught him telling. We had to have a plain talk, you see, because I don't want him to go to the reformatory."

At these words, I lost my temper.

"Do you realise that as long as that rogue remains in concealment, your case is obscure?" I cried out. "I shall go back at once, and——"

"No! You can't touch André Manadan on the strength of what I'm telling you. He has my promise that I sha'n't betray him."

I collapsed:

"You dear, adorable little donkey! You are enough to make one long for the physical strength to thrash your stupidity out of you—and you give one fresh confidence in the entire future of humanity!"

Smiling through very solemn eyes, he finished his story:

"I told that scamp what prison life was like, and how, put there by him, I'd been saved by you. And I said we should try to help him if he came and made a confession. The things are found, and the Marquis wouldn't prosecute; M. Badajèze wouldn't care for another scandal about his shop; and André Manadan's mother would perjure herself to the last tooth in her head for his sake. So there's really nobody to interfere, if he tells the truth and we back him up. But if he's caught using another boy's papers and signature, it will be no longer a case for his family and employer to decide. I warned him we couldn't save him from that, even if we wanted to; and there was no reason why we should trouble, unless he came forward spontaneously and told the truth about me. The picture I drew of prison life was lively, I promise you; and it's the penitentiary colony, ever so much worse, which is waiting for him if he's caught. I may be wrong," Paul concluded abruptly, "but I fancy he will turn up within the next few days. He's tired of hard work, and the attic he sleeps in is full of rats."

Now that for the first time he felt free to plan whatever he would, Paul went on to speak, almost whisperingly, of his innermost aspirations.

He knew what he wanted to do, but it would require years and cost much money. If I would help with the educational expenses while they weren't too severe, he asked to stay with me, helping in the house, running errands, learning to be my secretary, serving me in any way which might be a fair exchange. After a while, if he proved his worth, perhaps I would help further by lending him money which he could repay later.

He must take his degree, first, and then study law. Not

to practise, however; he only wanted to master it. As a means for earning a livelihood, he did not like it. Too often, the interpretation of texts counted for more than the true principle of justice. Countries made laws to maintain right and repress evil; and then an ably defended scoundrel stood a splendid chance for getting off scot-free, where an innocent person who lost his head, or lacked friends, or had not a genius as counsel, might be sent to prison by mistake on circumstantial evidence. He felt he had to know law, as a step towards his real work.

"Did I tell you," he said, "when speaking of the scene in M. Badajèze's parlour, of a voice I heard? I call it a voice, yet it wasn't quite that. When you speak, for instance, I hear a sound in my ear, and then I understand. This didn't make any sound, outside; I just understood at once, as if I were hearing inside. I heard the words plainly. They weren't my imagination; at the time, I thought they must be; but I got to know that inner voice very well, later. It would come when I wanted to scream and fling myself against the walls of my cell. I knew that was a silly thing to do; when such cries and noises reached me from other cells, and the guards came running, the thud of blows and the screams for mercy were too horrible." He shuddered. "—Oh, no!" he answered my startled look with scathing sarcasm. "There was no corporal punishment—not *officially*. But when boys attempted to dash their brains out. . . .

"I knew such behaviour wouldn't do any good; but at times a sort of fury would come over me, and all I could do was to repeat to myself those words about calm which had come to me in more or less calm moments. I would repeat them like a rosary—praying for calm, the thread connecting with the God of Nature. And as soon as I got control

of myself, the voice would speak again, but always the same message after those attacks, always the same words, 'Courage—Patience—Right Doing and Thinking'; or else those about All Time and All Space.

"And now, after leaving me, that voice has come back: with different words. It tells me I have work to do, and that I am living expressly to do it. I must help boys who are as I was—both at home and in prison."

Within a week, André Manadan reappeared; and events came to pass very much as Paul had foreseen.

And then—(my hand trembles as I write of it)—the stain being effaced from the boy's name, Clermont proclaimed his just and legal rights as a father; and Paul, taken from me, was sent back to the workshop.

PART THREE
—
DEATH

I

THE apprentices were busy at almost noiseless tasks, when Robert Lavenu, a streak of blue and red, a crash of steel and leather, bolted through the workshop and rushed to the house-door.

"It's coming—it's here!" he shouted.

Those at the work-table looked up quickly, and toiled on more quietly than before, with restrained breathing. The door, pushed to, had not quite closed.

"I'm ordered to rejoin my corps," Robert Lavenu continued. He sat excitedly on the edge of a chair. "The Germans are mobilising all along the frontier, where they have stretched chains, and are cutting away the brush, and placing advanced batteries."

The phrases had tripped over each other, and appeared to have many more behind them, when he was stopped by Père Elard, the man who looked like a carpenter and lived on an income. Lavenu did not seem to have noticed Père Elard until this moment; on entering he had shaken hands only with M. Badajèze and Mademoiselle Odette.

"Eh! Eh! How you go at it, you young people!" the old man croaked. "Lucky there are some white heads still in the world!"

"We aren't the ones to blame," the trooper protested. "If the Germans will make trouble, let them look to themselves, that's all! Why, we of the regular army are ordered back to our posts only to-day, and the reservists aren't yet called—whereas in Germany they are mobilising,

requisitioning, taking over mills, clearing railway platforms. That surely means business! And we are so afraid of putting ourselves in the wrong that we don't even dare begin proper defensive measures."

Mademoiselle Odette had looked on, tearful and frightened.

"But why should we fight over the murder of a foreign archduke?" she demanded. "Though Serbians may not like what the Emperor of Austria says, and the Tsar may promise to support them, what has that got to do with France?"

"Don't you see Germany wants to sweep us off the map first, so as to deal with Russia afterwards? Let her try!" thundered Robert Lavenue. "I know what our plans are, and we shall carry them out, too."

"Much a soldier in the ranks can know about plans," sneered Père Elard.

"We know what our officers tell us," Lavenue returned, losing his temper. "You won't be pretending our officers don't know, I suppose? And they have been saying the same things to us for more than a year: 'The Germans are going to attack us treacherously. At the first alarm, it is you who will move forward to hold the frontier until our mobilisation is completed. You may die to the last man, but you will be the saviours of France. The nation counts on you, my children.' Words like that are an inspiration, I can tell you! We didn't mind the hard work, the deep snow, the bad quarters, the forced marches, or the night alarms, after hearing what they meant. And we hear it all again whenever we get slack. I can tell you, we, the Eastern troops, are ready to defend the frontier, and enter Alsace-Lorraine too, as soon as Germany attacks."

Père Elard had leaned forward, listening attentively. He waited, as if expecting Lavenu to continue; then said:

“You are sure you won’t go towards Belgium?”

Lavenu laughed:

“What could our best troops do up north?”

Père Elard’s curiosity was appeased.

“You do well to talk, since you will have no occasion to act,” he said. “There will be no war, because the Socialist party will not allow it. Meetings in Germany have passed resolutions, and are bringing pressure to bear upon the Government.”

“How do you know?” asked M. Badajèze.

“From the newspapers. And side by side is news of the meetings we French Socialists are organising. Manifestos are to be published, too, warning the proletariat not to encourage the capitalistic crime of war. We have weapons, if they must be used. If only we work all together——”

“We shall be working for the King of Prussia!” concluded M. Badajèze, furiously.

“Ah! You are a bad brother. I have always heard you were a bad brother.” The little old carpenter—who lived on an income—wagged his feeble white head.

“Yes, I am—and I’ll tell you why!” M. Badajèze spoke explosively. “Indeed, I am scarcely a brother at all, since I have seen the use Socialism has tried to make of France in the interests of Germany. We had to employ German workmen—brotherly love. We had to buy German goods—brotherly love. We had to make national concessions and territorial sacrifices to Germany—brotherly love. And what were we getting? Why, the brotherly love—of spies who were taking our wealth from us and tarnishing our honour and selling us into the bar-

gain! We were told, here in France, that we could prevent war by means of strikes and insurrection. Some went to the extent of saying, 'Use your guns to shoot your officers in the back, rather than murder your German brothers.' But the rest, who didn't dare go so far, said, 'Strikes and insurrection!' We asked if German Socialists would do as much. 'Certainly, certainly!' they answered. But we were ready to give pledges, and they were not. At three successive congresses of the Socialist party—Stuttgart, Copenhagen, and Basle, if you would know—our delegates were ready to give pledges; but when they tried to get pledges, they failed. So, say I, our zealous 'brothers' are preparing to deliver France tied and wounded into the hands of Germany. But there are some of us who know better, and we must be taken into account. That is why I am a bad brother, M. Elard!"

"You are cowardly, to insult a man of my years," screamed the carpenter, as he tottered out into the street. He slammed the door after him, and the apprentices turned back to their tasks.

On his way home, Paul was impressed by the peaceful, normal aspect of everything that came within his field of vision. The shadows on the river—the trees rising beyond—the men and the women, and a vehicle or two crossing the bridge at a leisurely pace—the streets, from thoroughfares to modest alleys, all as they might be on any other day—he looked with renewed wonder at each of these homely, comforting expressions of dull, provincial existence far from any cause for excitement. He had no idea, then, that he was not again to witness normal life in Verviller. The strange thing is that he found not premonition of impending doom, but conviction that all was well, in the vividness with which the town demanded his

attention on that last day of its sweet, old-fashioned serenity.

The sun set beyond the Mareille, a ball of angry fire glowing baleful and blood-red on long thick clouds of rose and gold.

"That's the dust," said a voice. "All these carts and carriages do it, hurrying along every road." The speaker hurried on, too.

Paul, leaning upon the stone parapet of the bridge, did not move nor speak. Of course the roads were filled with dust, and so were the streets of the town. Every available vehicle bore men and women fervidly this way or that. Yet dust was but dust. And there, beyond the fields and the woods, beyond the valley and the far hills, beyond the world itself, the sun in the heavens heralded the ordeal of fire with omens of carnage and conflagration.

Because of the contrast, perhaps, Paul thought of another sunset he had watched from the top of the Ripote; a sunset of soft beauty and inspiring flame, of peace and security and useful toil. Ended—all ended. There remained only war. This very night, the peace which still hung over ignorant nature would be broken by the roar of trains bearing soldiers and supplies for the defence of France.

The awful quiet of that blood-red sunset came after days full of menace and violence. Wherever Paul had stopped, in crowded ways among people who talked loud or walked rapidly, he had heard of imminent war or growling revolution. The latter seemed nearer and more to be dreaded than the former. While the appetites of the mob were whetted to violence, the nerves of orderly citizens sought a sense of security in hoarding gold and

silver. And none dared protest against disregard of public right, not knowing what the morrow held nor whose law would rule.

Then Paul had gone out on an errand for M. Badajèze. He noticed a crowd more still, more earnest, more orderly and estimable than any he had seen since the gravity of the international situation had been known; fine black jackets rubbed against threadbare coats or workingmen's smocks. All eyes were reading a few lines written by hand on a bit of paper stuck against a door. Having chanced to come by at this moment, Paul learned, as they did, from ink not yet dry, that the order for general mobilisation was signed.

A policeman stood there; in friendly tones he repeated: "Come! Move on! Read, and let others read!"

The crowd, swollen at every instant but with each face calm and earnest like those gone before, like those pressing after, read and moved on.

Regardless of class or education, the comments made were the same, varying only in their expressions:

"Of course! Germany had declared the state of menace of war. She could mobilise completely before acknowledging it."

"That meant her whole army could strike while only our protective detachments would be at the frontier."

"We can't be called the aggressors. But at least we shall be in a position to defend ourselves."

"Yes; if necessary."

That word of hopeful doubt never failed. Prompt measures were vitally essential against a possible aggression so often threatened that it must come some day. But none could genuinely believe the hour to be present. The Government itself did not appear to believe. While all

Verviller lay under the spell of such news, did not a proclamation come declaring that negotiations continued?

Verily, France wished peace. The fact stood out from many remarks Paul heard when men stopped to analyse public affairs. Yet an expression in the faces of all proved them willing to meet the war, whatever the odds. There was no sentiment of relief that the storm should break at last, stopping long-protracted flashes and thunders. But if relief was absent, courage and determination lay revealed on all sides, in every pose and gesture, in every inflexion of the voice. A united sentiment of simple, noble duty swayed the race which, one hour before, had thought singly of comforts and privileges.

Over Verviller lay an intense hush filled with muffled echoes of distant feet and of speeding wheels. So the night passed, and all the next day, with eager inquiries for news which did not come, with hasty preparations many of which might never serve, with patient waiting for the end to be reached in moments each in itself too short.

And now, under cover of the approaching night, the great movement must begin by which France would say to the world, "I am ready."

Impressive as was the thought, and active as had been the day, Paul felt calmer than when reading the bit of paper stuck to the door, the previous afternoon. For then it had all seemed so unreal as to be terrifying—and it had grown so real as to be the most natural thing in the world. It was inevitable as the course through space of the sun itself, with its train of planets and satellites and fragments of dead stars.

The town, as darkness grew closer, became still and deserted. A town of the dead, without objective for

chance wanderers. No life—few lights—only distant sounds. The beat of a stray step would seem to fill with echoes all the plain of the Mareille. And then those echoes would weaken away, ever in one same direction, as if sucked to the vortex by a force each heart must feel and obey—the force of humanity breathing, and thinking, and suffering, pressed close together before parting.

In the crowd about the station, where every resident of Verviller and all the surrounding peasantry, too, seemed gathered, Paul worked his way forward. The entrance was held by policemen and soldiers, and barriers had been put up; earlier in the evening, it was said, people had forced passages and got in; very strict orders had been given, and the guards reinforced: those without must stay out.

Counting, with the confidence of youth, on part-luck, part-resourcefulness, Paul persisted. Bending in and out under people's elbows, across the small of their backs, or brazenly into any diminutive space allowed for breathing, he advanced inch by inch. Observing no one and thinking of naught but the care needed for his movements, he found that none noticed him. Boys and even a man or two were roundly cursed, within a yard of him, for causing less inconvenience and gaining less ground than himself, while he passed unseen. Keeping his thought detached, he was aware as of a panorama slipping slowly past him, inch after inch.

Very quiet, very orderly, this crowd, with practically nothing to say. Generalities were no longer mentioned; none seemed to care how the war had come, nor why.

From the station, shrill screams of whistles resounded through the town. Soon the rhythm of heavy feet tramping in unison rose from the stones. A body of young men

came marching as if already in uniform. Of one age and actuated by one sentiment, they were of varied conditions—or rather, they had been, for France knew no more such distinctions as trade or business or aristocracy. Murmurs of confidence, in a tone of benediction, followed these boys; they, smiling yet serious, would call back an occasional word. Twice or thrice, the beat of something said in chorus might be caught. None of the boasting, none of the challenge, none of the recklessness which had heralded olden disasters was conveyed by this hope too sacred to be cried out, and deep-rooted so as to endure. The new war was beginning without wild cheers or historic phrase, but with hearts determined instead of light, and necessities attended to instead of gaiter-buttons.

That the future soldiers might reach the station, the crowd fell back, urged on by the police. Paul was hugged so tight between two men that he left the ground and stayed suspended for a moment. He fought to regain his footing before a loosening of this pressure should let him fall, perhaps to be trampled upon. As he freed himself, he stumbled forward. Accident, and the position to which he had methodically worked his way, put him in the first line. Among those passing, he recognised Marcel Lavenue. Paul grasped his arm, and was swept on. A minute later, he was beyond the barriers, and in the station.

“You coming?” Marcel whispered excitedly.

“Coming—where?” Paul tried to suppress his voice, yet was so thrilled that it escaped him.

“Hush! To fight, of course.”

“No! How could I?”

“I am.”

“You can’t. You’re only six months older than I.”

"Sixty years older, you mean! Going to fight, I tell you. How can you bear to stay behind?"

"But Marcel—they are refusing enlistments from classes to be called later."

"That's why I had nothing to do with any of them. I slipped in here—and got you in, besides. You don't deny that, do you? Well! I'm going to slip into the train, just the same way. And when we get to the front, if I don't find soldiers to supply me with a cast-off uniform, and a gun and a cartridge-belt, then we're all unworthy of the name of Frenchmen! If you come along, I'll see you're cared for, too. Will you?"

The "Yes" was on Paul's lips—he throbbed under the mightiest elation of his life—when Duty laid her marble hand upon him, turning him cold and sick.

"Father's off in a few days, and I must support mother," he said weakly. "You haven't got anybody dependent on you, Marcel."

"What does that matter?" the other flared. "The war can't last more than three or four weeks; if Germany doesn't win at the first blow—and we won't let her do that—then she'll starve. For such a family as yours——" He saw the pain and the anger which swept Paul's face; changing tone suddenly, he said: "Don't let's quarrel. Do what you please. You may be right—for you. I'm right for me, anyhow."

Paul grasped his hand.

"I don't wish you good luck, because that brings bad." The stock phrase of his highly modernised anti-clerical school, where boys were conscientiously rid of "religious superstition," had returned to him. "But—here's to our meeting again in Verviller."

Mentally he added, "Sooner than you suppose." Marcel

would not get far in this mad-cap scheme. Many people had gained access to the station; but reaching the platforms and the trains would be another question. The wave of exultation at the thought of being in the ranks, of wearing the French uniform, of playing his part with gun and bayonet (which he did not know how to use) had subsided. He had a duty too, of a humbler kind, without praise or glory or even credit attached. To run away from one kind of obligation was as shameful as to run away from any other. What was the good of discipline in war, if the soldiers of the future did not obey orders?

Thanks to enterprise such as Paul had shown, or to special influence, or to privileges as relatives of soldiers about to leave, many had got into the entrance and waiting room. The Marquis de Vervillers and Frère Alexandre were among the first Paul recognised; the nobleman clapping workmen on the back and talking cordially with them, the Brother more gently but no less eloquently showing that lines of party and religion were smoothed away like those of caste and prejudice. Presently Père Elard, the Socialist carpenter who lived on an income, was holding the Marquis by the edge of his sleeve, while Frère Alexandre was all but embraced by the Communal school-teacher, alleged to be a rabid priest-baiter. A dashing young lieutenant, in perfectly tailored uniform, saluted a fat, dowdy captain. The inferior was the Comte de Vervillers, son and heir to the Marquis; the superior was a local bricklayer. The two shook hands, and began to talk; Paul learned that they were officers of reserves in the same regiment. Perfect understanding reigned between them.

Suddenly jarred from behind, Paul looked around. André Manadan, terrified, shrank away. Paul said,

"Don't be afraid of me—I'm *French!*" Yes, there was something contagious, inspiring, in the very air they breathed.

Gates were opened. A few last embraces; a cheer more subdued and holier than all the rest; a larger number of tearful faces, with more resolute efforts to hide traces of weakness—and it was over.

Marcel Lavenu had melted away in the throng.

Filled with surpassing loneliness, Paul looked out from his window, after returning home. Long darts of flame, clear as the streak of a sword, shone upon the silvered thread of steel tracks and plunged forward, endlessly forward, leaving in their wake brief blotches of blackness which also travelled on and on, while new flames, new long clear streaks rushed close after. When his eyes grew used to the great skimming head-lights, he saw that the blackness following them was alight also; not brilliant, not continual, but evanescent as glow-worms. And the roar that went with each troop-train, dying away as softly as it began, yet dominated ever by the rumbling, the grinding, the speeding that came abreast, was like unceasing thunder in rock-caverns by the sea.

II

WITHIN the week, Verviller took on a new aspect. There was no room for sadness nor loneliness. The streets were thronged with soldiers; the avenues impassable with horses tied to trees. Nothing to eat could be bought at any hotel or restaurant; but numberless untenanted shops had been transformed into places where light wines or beer, and syrups and coffee were sold. The troops had been divided up among all the flats and houses in town; where residents were present a certain amount of space

was left for their use, where they were absent the authorities broke in the doors and took possession.

Thirty troopers and a sergeant were quartered upon Paul's mother, his father having already gone to the front. The men slept on hay all over the hall, and upstairs; caps, belts, bayonets, hung from every knob or nail. Very discreet, very orderly, talking low, they were giving their first proof of discipline in obedience to commands that they should not disturb unnecessarily those among whom they were billeted. Paul's grandparents had come from Arnan, and the two rooms on the ground-floor had been left to the family. If Paul regretted his window, he was happy to sleep in the kitchen and leave his room to French soldiers.

Madame Clermont grew almost gay, and looked to her toilet once more. She would stand for an hour at a time, chatting with the men. There were of all kinds among them, but mostly shopkeepers and employés. One trooper turned out to be the proprietor of a large Parisian bakery—closed, because he and all his staff were called out. His comrades-in-arms were similarly embarrassed. But they seemed to have only one idea—to reach the frontier and fight quickly and be rid once for all of German threats.

“What I want most is to fight; and next, to know what chance we really stand,” the baker said one morning to Madame Clermont. “Because if we don't crush the Germans so as to have done with them for ever, then they'll begin this over again.”

Another trooper listened, young, dark, handsome, and aristocratic in spite of his heavy-wear, ill-fitting uniform, with his collar unbuttoned over a throat as fair and smooth as a woman's. The medal with his matriculation

number hung by a leather thong round his neck; he kept caressing it, and nodded occasional approbation.

The woman made a breezy remark about the Allied forces. With Russians, Belgians, English to be added to the French——

The baker looked doubtful; the handsome, dark young trooper pursed his clean-shaven, finely chiselled lips, and tossed the medal rather more energetically.

"That's all very well," the baker burst out. "But this is our own fight. We're glad of their help, but we don't count on anybody besides ourselves. Only, we must win!"

At which the young aristocrat's handsome, olive-skinned face cleared, and he let the medal fly back to its place under his tunic.

"That's the spirit which does it!" said Madame Clermont in her high, guttural voice.

Although the baker alone had spoken, she had not addressed him. Her eulogy, like her smiles, went to the dark young trooper.

Paul, who had stood by watching and listening, flushed and went out.

Not much time was allowed him. The breaking of numerous locks on the eve of mobilisation, and the damage since done by heavy soldier hands, had caused his trade to be the most thriving in the region, after that of coffee-sellers and hair-cutters. Beginning promptly at six, he ended sometimes after eight; but, as a junior workman, was now paid accordingly. The apprentices looked up with awe to their promoted elder; the more so since the bibulous *compagnon* was mobilised, leaving Paul next in authority to M. Badajèze himself.

Under the stress of prevailing excitement and of the

numerous calls from all sides, the artistic locksmith had grown more than ever convinced of his importance.

"I have told you," he harangued the boys on several occasions—because he repeated himself, did worthy M. Badajèze—"I have told you that wars would be ended only when my trade should no longer be needed by mankind. Well! You perceive now that wars cause me to be needed far more than ever!"

The apprentices grinned. As a matter of fact, they and the junior workman were the ones needed, these repairs were so simple.

With most of the town and its neighbourhood, the rule was to attend only to what might be essential. People preferred to have doors that would lock, even though they had soldiers to lodge. Paul visited many homes, from the grandest to the humblest, and learned to know Ver-viller in an intimate way. He had no other diversion. His grandfather had fallen into a state of virtual imbecility, his grandmother was a hopelessly crippled rheumatic who could only whine about her "pains"; Marcel Lavenu had not reappeared, and the apprentices were of a nature so different from his that intimacy could not exist; M. Aubret had gone to Paris about a passport, and had been unable to return.

At least a score of windows demanded attention at the enormous château; the Marquis accommodated ten or twelve officers in his best rooms, and put an entire wing at the disposal of the soldiery. The old gentleman was stirring up all the influence he could command in France, to be restored to the rank of captain he had once held, and from hour to hour he hoped to hear the good news. He sent for Paul, and patted him on the shoulder, asking what had become of M. Aubret and laughing at the same

time; and finally dismissed the boy with a five-franc tip. The taking of tips always humiliated Paul; he had refused them, at first, and been rated for this "stupidity" by the *compagnon*, who said he not only spoiled the business but offended clients—which Paul perceived to be true. So he tried to get used to the feeling, and his mother found the money entirely acceptable. But this tip hurt more than any he had ever taken—though silver had grown scarce.

The Marquis had also ordered work done at the school-house, which had been converted into veritable barracks. Since new troops were pouring in steadily, only the lock on Frère Alexandre's door was seen to. Paul found the Brother oldened and saddened, and he listened to the beginning of a homily on Christian virtues and the duty of the labouring classes. Something of the old childish reverence and almost love for Frère Alexandre survived even now.

One day, as he passed through the rue du Port, Léonie rushed out, screaming; and on the pretext of a broken key, brought him in to the house and bade him "look." The spectacle turned him quite sick, he acknowledged later. Even my study had been stacked with straw, and my drawing-room chairs, pulled close together, had served as beds; pictures everywhere were racks for bayonets and other tools of war. But no damage was done, and not an article was gone.

Soldiers came, soldiers went; the old were replaced by new, who in turn became old before going in turn; and so day succeeded day in a town no longer Verviller, but active, happy, triumphant.

One morning, the streets were filled with marching companies, off to the front; and none came in their stead.

The men regularly mobilised were all equipped and disposed of; Verviller should not see further troops for the present, though convoys of wounded might be expected. The waiting-room at the station was converted into an ambulance; the former convent, closed by the Government but belonging to the Marquis, was opened as a bandage-room by the Marquise, a stout, black-haired, pleasant-looking lady, with a grey-hued complexion and very red lips, who gravely used long-handled glasses. Many young ladies from the town made bandages there; Made-moiselle Odette, too, had been admitted.

If her hours in the dining-room were scarce, Paul thrilled only the more when he caught glimpses of the brown hair, or heard her delightful voice, whether or not words could be distinguished.

She was always very patriotic, exulting at each report of victory; her father, good-humouredly confident, laughed whenever she talked.

"You should be the last to rejoice," he told her. "After the war, you may have trouble in finding a sound husband."

"I shall marry none but a wounded hero!" she declared. "Only yesterday, the girls at the bandage-room were discussing that, and we all vowed to marry glorious mutilated men. The thing we couldn't agree about was what kind of maiming made the best husband. Some of the girls preferred a blind man, who could not watch them too closely. None wanted an armless man, as a matter of choice, you know, because he would need so very much care; though he couldn't slap his wife. I myself would most willingly take a man without legs; he could be set up in a corner, so as to give really very little trouble, and when I said to him 'Be good!' he wouldn't dare refuse!"

For the first time, Paul was able to think, without a nauseating horror, of the mutilations of battle. To be cared for by Mademoiselle Odette—even to be set up in a corner by her, if one were reduced to a human trunk—would be adequate reward for sufferings and privations. And though blind, the memory of her voice would cheer the darkness of eternal night and of infinite isolation.

Père Elard, who had rallied from his anger and had again grown assiduous in calling here as elsewhere, shook his dried old head dolefully:—

“Eh! Eh! I fear you may have occasion to be as good as your word, Mademoiselle Odette; and you will have many victims to select among. Don’t be deceived by these skirmishes in Alsace. The war has not begun, for our troops have not yet met the Prussians. I, who fought them in 1870, know what they are. These days we have been beating only the shoddy edges of the German army, the Bavarian and Wurtembergian riff-raff. Until we have beaten the Prussians themselves, we must not think we are safe—and we can’t beat them.”

“Enough of such croaking!” M. Badajèze thundered. “Keep to yourself the chills of your sluggish old blood—and let young, virile France rejoice!”

“While she can,” Père Elard muttered between his stumps of teeth as he hobbled away.

The town still thrilled with stories of victory, when refugees began to arrive with rumours of reverse. None could be so unpatriotic as to credit them. Only when wounded soldiers at the station brought, with their martial prestige, confirmation worse than the first reports, did people consent to believe. Then refugees arrived with

evidence which could not be questioned. All destitute, all with drawn faces and wide, red eyes, they were scattered along the roads, pressing towards the west and crying out their fear of the hordes wreaking death and destruction which followed close upon their heels. It was from desolate mothers and grandparents that France knew fully of the catastrophe which threatened. It was by them that the nation's calm of dignity was changed to that awful, inspiring calm of stolid despair which will remain ever revered and unforgotten by those who endured or witnessed it.

An order came for the wounded to be evacuated from Verviller. Next, word was brought that the last west-bound train would leave that night; civilians were urged to go before the bridges over the Mareille should be blown up. The rumbling of cannon had been heard for some days, intermittently; it became so loud and so customary that its rhythm seemed to beat with the town's very life. A fair number of people left. The Marquis de Vervillers decided to go, as his last hope for reaching the front, via Paris; and the Marquise, whose utility had been destroyed by the closing of the station ambulance, accompanied him. She wished to take Odette Badajèze, among other girls; but the artistic locksmith stoutly refused.

"I shall know how to defend my daughter," he said.

The same sentiment was echoed in many breasts. People felt that they should stay to protect their property; and while they could no longer deny the crimes committed against civilians, they held individual soldiers responsible. Who had not heard of Teutonic educational methods and philosophical ideas? And who, after knowing of them, could fail to believe in the good behaviour of masses brought up under such influences?

Père Elard, more of a pessimist than ever, opined that everybody ought to go; but he himself did not purpose moving.

"Though the town be taken, we shall be protected, if we behave in an orderly manner," said M. Badajèze. "If a drunken soldier insults my daughter, I shall kill him. Any officer who is a man will support me."

"Eh! Eh!" croaked the old carpenter. "You don't understand that these atrocities we hear about, this whole system of terrorisation, are part of the German strategic plan. I remember how, in '70, French sharp-shooters saved many a village, since the enemy could not know who was firing nor in what numbers; and how civilians doing scout duty, called spying by the Germans, rendered considerable services to our army. The object of the present methods is to stop all that, and also to block the roads with refugees and their carts and cattle, so that the movements of our troops may be impeded. It has been a success from both points of view—and our press has foolishly spread the news, which was just what the Germans wanted!"

"I can suppose a drunken soldier capable of any outrage, and I admit the contagion of example," said M. Badajèze. "But I deny that educated officers of any race would deliberately execute coldly framed orders for wholesale infamies."

The old carpenter (who lived on an income) was very active, at that period; here and everywhere in the streets, and calling at all the houses he knew. Paul, whose workshop now closed at four and might almost as well have closed permanently, would run across him in the most unexpected places. Once he even met him on the top of the Ripote, with a rake. Père Elard explained he was after

some sort of roots, and seemed very cross about it; asked what Paul did there, and went away grumbling, straight home, without the roots.

That very day, hostile aeroplanes flew over Verviller, dropping bombs. The next, Paul caught sight of the first troops, retreating and stopping, but always fighting, with such a support of artillery that the ground shook where he stood.

The Battle of Verviller, so long announced by the cannon and prophesied by refugees, began that night.

III

"THE house trembled and jumped every second or two, and the roaring never seemed to stop. A few shells fell in the town, and bits of broken glass were scattered over the streets. But all that mattered to us was the noise. As night wore on, and it grew worse, we stuffed mattresses, pillows, blankets, overcoats, everything we could find, against the doors and windows. We didn't care what might happen, you understand; it was the noise we couldn't endure any longer. When we had muffled it just a little, we stretched out on the bare floor, all dressed, and felt—well—perhaps it's not going too far to say 'happy.' Being killed wasn't anything, provided we got relief from that maddening roar."

Paul spoke thus, lying on my bed at the Hôtel de l'Ile de France, in Paris. Worn, haggard, exhausted, he rested limply with wide-staring eyes and a helpless arm and both feet bandaged. Two officers had found him on the high-road, stupefied by hunger, exposure, physical effort, and moral suffering. In answer to their first questions, he repeated dully, again and again:

"They said I was to go to Paris—Tell what I had seen—

How they burned and killed and mutilated—They wouldn't kill me—They tied me up and held me—Wanted you to know what you should expect when they get to you—Threw me out of town, on the road to Paris—Said I was to come and tell what they made me see——”

The French officers observed that there were safer places than Paris, and tried to start him in a new direction. When he insisted that he must go on, they thought him a prey to German suggestion about telling what he had seen. Out of very kindness they used their authority to declare he should go no farther. This roused him from the stupor into which he had fallen. The repetition of ghastly phrases ceased, and he told them briefly that his family had been slaughtered, save for his father who was somewhere with the army, if not killed; his only friend, a sort of guardian, was in Paris. Struck by his story or his pathetic plight, or else perhaps impressed by the boy himself, the officers lent him money and gave full directions for reaching me. And so he tottered in to the hotel, one afternoon, with an arm stiff from a neglected bullet-scratch, his feet torn and bruised, his clothes ragged and gruesomely stained.

Upon getting to a bed, he fell into a protracted sleep; woke only to eat, and then slept again; remained speechless for some hours, staring wide-eyed at the ceiling; and finally, without question from me, began to talk.

The fighting had centred round the Ripote. French infantrymen had stubbornly held it; because of the steep incline, their artillery had coöperated from villages in the plain. Leaving detachments to carry the heights with bayonets, the Germans swept on, driving before them the bulk of the French army in that region. The enemy's

heavy artillery divided its attention between the Ripote and the town.

The aim seemed rather wild; the church-steeple and the château, the clearest marks of all, were not touched. The former convent and bandage-room, however, which had been hastily organised as an ambulance, was struck; from every five shells which reached the town, two or three fell near there.

Mademoiselle Badajèze had returned to her post; many women and girls worked on fearlessly, without supervision but in complete harmony. One shell pierced the roof and burst in a ward, killing a nurse and several patients.

"Take down the Red Cross flag!" some one shouted.

"What good will that do, now they have their aim?" cried Mademoiselle Badajèze, who knew from her father what was to be expected. "Find men, move the wounded anywhere far from here—and then don't hoist the flag on our new shelter!"

While zealous hands carried the helpless soldiers away, and those who could crawled in the wake of the others, the apprentice Ernest, become an ambulance scout, improvised a flag-staff and hoisted the Red Cross emblem on a deserted shed covering only plough-shares. Within an hour, the very plough-shares were pounded to scrap-iron.

Of those who had stoutly refused to leave town, declaring they would brave danger while none was present, a few began now to scatter over the country. Troops were pouring through Verviller, on their way to positions chosen along the course of the Mareille. Soldiers, grimy and gore-stained, with scorched faces and broken voices, rasped out their advice to non-combatants: "Better stay where you are—safer than elsewhere." Those bent on

fleeing were too terrified to listen; the soldiers, too battle-mad to mind: having spoken, they would gasp, "*À boire!*" and gulp down whatever was offered, water or wine.

While the French were in the act of concentrating, the Germans appeared on the high-road crossing the plain, along whose whiteness an oily spot of grey spread swiftly, immeasurably. The French artillery opened a fire whose double object was to retard this advance and to defend Verviller. The Germans trained heavy guns no longer on an inoffensive town, but on villages whence the French were firing with seventy-fives, and against the infantry filling a large part of the plain. Huge shells would fall within a few yards of each other, tearing, killing, demoralising.

Then it was that the noise within the town became wild, maddening, unendurable.

The French slept upon their positions, officers and men casting themselves down where they had stood, as soon as darkness, broken only by bursting shells, made further infantry action impossible. Unceasingly through the night, the flare of bursting shells brought those lurid, jagged spots of light, while the air was rent by the roar of guns and the crash of explosions and the shrieks of the injured.

Before dawn, all valid officers and men, and some with a wound hastily bound up, were afoot, prepared to fight with gun and bayonet, supported by such artillery as they had, against an invader superior in every respect save that of courage and persistency. The winding course of the Mareille was furiously disputed on both banks. But as the French thought they were gaining ground in the early morning—gaining ground, though they were stiff and exhausted by night upon three weeks of fighting without

adequate food, or ever a shelter, having been hourly under fire in the imminence of death and of complete rout—a rumour passed bringing a dismay immediately displaced by heroic resolve. Another German army had come up during the night, from beyond the far hills; the French were caught between this and the army already in the plain.

Then began a battle of desperate fortunes—for the Germans, swift advance to Paris and an early end to the war; for the French, the salvation of their soil.

The French artillery weakened. To start with, many of their guns had had but twenty shells apiece; now, some were silenced, and others used caps and explosives alone, to encourage their infantry and disturb the enemy. Luckily, the Germans were led to scatter their fire. No ruse of the French produced this diversion, but the Germans' own acute sense for ruses. A row of mechanical pump-handles, connected with wells, on one of the far hills which the French protected, was mistaken for a battery of seventy-fives naïvely exposed; and the pump-handles were pounded with untiring perseverance. If this foolish blunder did not save the French, it at least gained time for them.

The fighting, begun with rifles, soon degenerated into the most savage hand-to-hand conflicts. French soldiers, short of cartridges, lost patience with bayonets or else bent or broke them in their fury; taking rifles by the barrels, they used the butts as clubs, braining their adversaries. Men who stood unwounded were red with the blood of others; drunk with the smell of powder, and the sight of the carnage, and the contagion surrounding them.

“Who told you of this?” I asked Paul.

“The fighting? I saw it,” he said. “My window looked that way. And father had an old pair of opera-

glasses. I watched at sunrise, and again after coming home. It had seemed as if I wouldn't ever get back; and once there, I thought best to stay at the window. At least I could see something of what was going on. No use hiding downstairs or anywhere else. The Germans weren't sending us shrapnel, but only occasional big shells which passed through two or three storeys as well as one, so why bother? Some of the people who ran down in cellars were buried with the whole house on top. I don't suppose it made much difference for them in the end, when the burning and the killing came. But at the time I preferred the idea of dying where there was light and air.

"Early in the morning, I had gone to ask if I could help Mademoiselle Odette. But no more wounded were being brought in; there wasn't time, or the chance, either; and people like me, who hadn't any qualification save for carrying stretchers, were about in any quantity. The day before I'd been useful, when all the men from the Ripote were brought in. All? No. I don't mean that. Thousands died there in those pathetic little trenches, mere deepening of the ditches you and I saw together—deepened under the enemy's fire, the men who worked being killed so their comrades might be protected just a little. Our ambulance was filled till there wasn't a square yard of floor left without a human form on it. But I couldn't be of use now."

That casual remark was all I learned of his work there.

"M. Badajèze told me he was going into the centre of town, and I must come too. He wanted to see if the church-steeple had been hit. That question puzzled him.

"'People pretend the German marksmanship is bad,' he said. 'Yet they could hit the Red Cross flag wherever it was, on the ambulance or over the plough-shares.'

“‘Murdering the wounded,’ I said angrily.

“‘That’s not what they’re after,’ he answered. ‘They use the Red Cross to shelter their artillery and ammunition and supplies; so of course they suspect us of doing the same. Haven’t you ever noticed that the systematic liar suspects the word of everybody else, and that the man who enjoys “fooling” others is always on his guard against people ten times more honest than he? So the Germans, being of bad faith in their conventions and treaties and general honour, and thinking anything may be justified from the fact that they do it, conclude we can’t be any better. They aren’t destroying churches for the fun of it, but because their own theory is to use steeples for observatories and machine-guns.’

“‘As soon as we caught sight of the church, M. Badajèze took out his watch.

“‘The clock must have been hit,’ he said. ‘An hour slow.’

“‘I looked up, and exclaimed that we couldn’t have taken two hours to come from his house.

“‘But the hands have changed since a minute ago!’ he said.

“‘I couldn’t believe him. He scarcely believed himself, I think. Both of us looked for some time. And we both saw the hands spin round.

“‘The devil himself has got into the works,’ he said; and explained that a shell couldn’t have such an effect.

“‘The hands twirled again, and he declared he was going up. Of course I went too.

“‘The tower-door was locked. But if an artistic locksmith and his first junior workman couldn’t pick an out-of-date thing like that——”

Pride in his trade had almost made him forget, for a

moment, the tragedy which still hung over him. He sobered quickly:

"We got in, without noise. Half-way up the winding stairs, we were stopped by a screech-owl's nest with several young ones in it; no way to pass without stepping into the thing.

"'Much too clever,' M. Badajèze remarked. He had lowered his voice to a whisper. 'Whoever found that in the loft, and put it here as a blind, forgot watchers came yesterday. Take off your shoes.'"

Paul stopped.

"Who was it?" I prompted.

"Père Elard. A German spy. Been so for very long. He had an apparatus all ready, prepared in advance, for disconnecting the hands from the clock and turning them as he pleased, according to a code for signalling our positions."

"This accounts for his peculiar views which you used to quote!" I exclaimed.

Paul nodded:

"No wonder he lived on an 'income' from mysterious relatives nobody ever saw! No wonder he was always running down England, and complaining she had no army, and saying he wouldn't trust her to help us anyhow! When we caught him, he tried to buy his pardon from us by turning traitor against the Germans. His abject infamy was awful. But that wasn't the worst. He couldn't do his dirty work alone, so do you know whom he had bribed, or deceived, or browbeaten into helping him? Manadan, poor, weak, diseased little André Manadan! Pitiful little beggar, I can't believe he was a traitor, or meant to be. He didn't know—I would swear he didn't know. We delivered them both over to

the Mayor, who locked them up in a cellar while looking for an officer.

"Everybody agreed our army must be warned. There weren't any soldiers available in town; so I volunteered to go to the nearest post, in a little wood. An open part of the plain had to be crossed to reach it."

"Well?"

"I went."

"And then?"

"I got there." A silence. "It felt funny, when bullets whistled and I knew they were aimed at me. I think I was rather frightened. First experience, you know. Shells felt different; they were meant for anybody. But it was uncomfortable to think those bullets came specially after me.

"The colonel said I had been foolish to come. There was a military post in town which could have telephoned, giving the message better and more quickly. Only we didn't know. I'd risked drawing fire on them by crossing that part of the plain. It may have been that, or else Père Elard's last message; but shells certainly did begin to fall thick in that wood. I was told to stay.

"Like me, a woman was kept sort of prisoner there—a woman I had seen before, in the street. She had a huge form, and a small round head, with fat rosy cheeks and black hair drawn very tight to a knot on her fat neck; always used to talk patriotically, and say the war had better come and be done with it. But she was terrified now. Every time a shell burst, she would scream and run away; and since they were bursting in every direction, you can imagine the sort of criss-cross game she played. At last the colonel got sorry for her; besides, this business was rattling the nerves of the men.

"Don't you see," he said, "that what you are doing there is very foolish—that you are multiplying your own risks?" He went on to explain that there was a very small chance for a shell to fall in any one spot she might choose, but by changing places every minute she was exposing herself to the greatest possible number of chances. It was done so kindly, and in such simple language, that she understood, and thanked him, and promised not to move again. Nor did she—ever.

"The colonel walked away. I followed him. We heard and felt an explosion. We both looked round. The very next shell had fallen right on her and literally blown her to atoms—vaporised her, there where she had been told to stand for safety! The colonel turned green.

"After that, the fire grew so hot that the post was moved, and I got permission to go back. Then I went to my window and watched."

The battle lasted throughout the day, the Germans gaining ground along the high-road, but not from the far hills, where they had thought to surprise the French. Again that night, officers and men slept on their positions. An urgent call had been sent for ammunition, which might still come in time. But next morning, when the artillery's voice failed to speak, it became evident that the field could not be held. In this extremity, the commanding general resolved on a seeming retreat which should be a concentration at the Ripote, already twice lost and regained. If surrounded there, he would see his army cut to pieces; but that was where he had the best hope for ammunition and reinforcements.

The town filled with gaunt, grimy, blood-stained men, supported above exhaustion by the lust of battle, many of them wounded but fighting on until shot or struck

again. As the last valid men crossed the bridge, engineers blew it up, when the Germans were within a few yards—such quick work that three of the French were lost in the ruins they created.

While the Germans crossed the river, their artillery was trained on Verviller. Some of the finest buildings were wrecked, and now that the church tower had stopped giving signals, it was hit repeatedly, as were the château and the town hall. From all the windows along the river-front, French soldiers poured a deadly rifle-fire on pontoon-bridges the Germans were throwing out; and soldiers who tried swimming across were hashed to pieces by bullets when they reached the bank. But with the might of inexhaustible numbers and with a courage which knew no shade of hesitation, they continued to come, until they closed in with the last of the French who dared cover, from the town, the end of the retreat. The streets rang with reports and echoes of rifle-shots, and dull blows of bayonets.

Night was falling. The Germans took nominal possession; next morning, they entered officially.

When the bridge had been blown up, the house rocked and the glass of Paul's window showered about his head. He ran downstairs:

"No more of our soldiers were to be seen, and I couldn't bear to watch only Germans. Mother vowed she wasn't afraid; said she knew how to take care of herself. I didn't fear for her, much; she wasn't at all attractive, any more," he explained gravely. "Besides, she had grandmother and grandfather as a protection—very old people, whom nobody could hurt, I believed.

"Before the street-fighting began, there was one thing I thought of. That is, I had thought of it often, but I

knew this was the time. I went to your house. Léonie was in an extraordinary state of excitement. Positively cursing our soldiers for allowing themselves to be driven away by Germans! Almost slapped me when I said I wanted to save something. Said she undertook to defend the house alone against a thousand Germans. But I went in.

"What I had come for was your manuscript. Then it occurred to me that if I were well dressed they might treat me better, so I put on my brown suit and best shoes in my own room, upstairs. The clothes were a good idea. But later, on the road, when my feet got torn all to pieces, I almost cried for my good old hob-nailed boots.

"Your manuscript wasn't easy to find; everything turned upside down, stuffed into drawers and cupboards on top of whatever you had put away yourself; but I got it at last. Just at that moment I heard the fighting get very close; I thrust the papers up under my waistcoat, and ran home. The rest of your things, I reflected, were safer in your house, as a neutral, than they would be with me. But I didn't intend that manuscript to be lost unless I was, too."

He lay very still for a while, and said:

"It would have gone anyway, when your house was burned."

"Do you think I consider such details, when I have you?"

"It would have gone anyway," he went on as if I had not spoken, "and I should have been killed."

The Germans, fearing a trap, perhaps, kept very quiet, that night; and the townspeople, of course, were voiceless. In fact, Paul believed the enemy had only posted guards.

Their conduct upon taking possession was orderly; severe, but orderly. A proclamation warned the citizens

to be calm if they would avoid reprisals. Forty hostages were held, among them Frère Alexandre, dragged from the bedsides of the wounded; M. Badajèze and M. Lavenu; and Paul's grandfather, this last perhaps because of his venerable appearance, since he was neither rich nor influential. They were paraded through the streets, and insults heaped upon them by invading soldiers, though hostages are supposed to be sacred. The Mayor, who had received the enemy with firmness and dignity, and who had been officially respected for a few hours, was placed at the head of this sad procession. The Curé, who had been ministering to the dying, was put in the ranks too, and forced to walk though he had an ulcerated leg and fell several times from pain and weakness; each time, he would be picked up and kicked, and forced into line once more. They were finally all thrown into the cellars of the town hall and given only buckets of water which, their guards told them, represented "food and drink." Meanwhile, famished soldiers were busy devouring all provisions and systematically looting wine. Not a house but was entered with cries of "Champagne! Champagne!" Where it was produced in sufficient quantities, they respected the giver—temporarily.

Save for the noise from the battle raging round the Ripote that day passed quietly enough in the town. People remained within doors; there was no cause for complaint beyond the treatment given to the hostages and the seizing of food and wine.

His grandfather being in the hands of the enemy, Paul felt an especial weight resting upon him; the slightest altercation into which he might get would be doubly fatal. His mother's condition alarmed him. Reserved and gentle, almost affectionate when she spoke, beneath the

surface one felt, in the depths of a nature which had never revealed itself, a concentrated fury capable of bursting out in a worthy cause.

She soothed her mother's moans and put a fresh bandage on the old woman's inflamed and swollen knee. Seeing Paul move to the door, she called out:

"I forbid you to go in the street! Big as you are—they might—they might——"

She actually broke down and cried.

Shortly before sunset, the enemy's humour changed. The French on the Ripote were unexpectedly supported by their artillery, whose supplies the Germans had ineffectually tried to cut off. Fighting on the hill-side became furious, and the French arriving from the plain gained ground. Alarming reports reached the staff in Verviller; there was talk of evacuation, and menace of reprisals if this should be forced, while soldiers madly emptied down their throats the bottles they had captured. A French shell struck the château, immediately over the room which the general used as his office. It became evident, from this moment, that the town was doomed.

The pretext was found readily enough. Poor old Mère Rollinet took it into her cracked head that these soldiers had killed the son for whose return she had waited since the winter of 1870. Rushing with wild screams through the streets, she fell with weak, withered fists upon the broad chest of a huge infantryman who immediately ran his bayonet through her—in self-defence. For his superiors, it sufficed that blood was shed. An order came for the hostages to be executed and the town burned.

What Paul had to tell stopped here, as a narrative. In a few short, terrible phrases, he depicted the rest. But

the scene so summarily painted rises before me as if I had witnessed it—as indeed I am witness to its ruins and to some of the lives that were wrecked.

I seem to see squads of men in mouse-grey systematically at work as they ransack the houses before torches are lighted. All plunder being gathered and removed to safety, I see soldiers run from door to door with incendiary fuses and powders brought, all ready from Germany, for such tasks as this. I seem to see the flames writhe slowly, half smothered in smoke, and subside as if loath to be slaves of such masters. And I see vast sheets of flame spread and rise, absorbing, irresistible, while petroleum and gasoline are showered to hasten the town's fate.

The hostages, drawn up in the square before the town hall, are mowed down with machine-guns. I see Frère Alexandre fall, tall and pale, with a final deprecating gesture of the white hands; I see M. Badajèze, grim, prophetic, ironic beneath a fury menacing apoplexy up to the very instant of death; I see the poor old grandfather with his pale eyes looking puzzled and weary to the last.

As far as formal orders went, the people of the town were to be spared; but murders and infamies begin, somehow, as of themselves. Any who try to escape towards a suburb are picked off like rabbits; any who try to rescue a mite from a burning home are thrust into the brazier with bayonets used as pitchforks; women who are not killed are outraged, and some endure both. A boy, caught by the hand and hacked with a sword, runs on for a few steps, screaming and waving a trunk which bathes him in blood before he drops in a writhing heap.

Paul has been hurrying about the town, seeking some one; by a miracle, he has escaped injury. He has cultivated inner mastery and outer detachment; he sees all

things but looks at nothing, hears everything but makes no comment, passes everywhere but takes no thought for his physical existence: he is spirit alone by the power of will. And the abstraction which he has made of his body deflects the thought of those who would harm him.

He reaches the square, which is burning too. Flames thrust out their long tongues from the church tower and from the château windows; the crash of walls and the crackling of fires mingle with the report of cannon from the plain near the hill, and the dry report of shots bringing down helpless townspeople. There, the boy stumbles against a row of corpses, the feet still chained together. As he recognises one among the victims, two women come up, a young and an old. Piercing shrieks ring out over the body of an aged man; an instant later, soldiers rush forward. A shot is fired, which grazes the boy's arm: the two women are struck again and again with bayonets, until their forms lose human semblance. The boy, numbed and bewildered, watches with eyes which have ceased to see anything beyond blood and flames, with a mind which wonders at but one horror surpassing all the rest—that he should be spared to experience this.

But he has failed to note that a manuscript, thrust beneath his waistcoat, has fallen out: a captain has seized upon it.—English! What! Are those devils intriguing here too? The captain orders that the boy's execution be stayed while he reads these papers.

The roaring of flames fills a town whose other voices are dumb; soldiers have retreated to safe suburbs, taking with them one or two prisoners held by order; among the injured, those who could walk or crawl have followed and escaped death by fire.

The captain seeks the point whither he has sent the boy.

The papers are a mere work of part-theory, part-erudition, on lines not at all Teutonic, hence contemptible, written by some fool with a French name who uses Americanised English. The boy is not a witness worth keeping. But the captain is sick of slaughter and outrage; his scorn goes equally to the chiefs who coldly plan and to the men who willingly execute such acts. One life more would not count; yet the captain hesitates.

"For God's sake, finish me!" the boy cries out, tugging at his bound hands. "You have murdered all my family before my eyes—life is too horrible! Kill me and be done with me, if you are human!"

"No, you shall live," says the captain, suddenly inspired. "You shall live to go to Paris and tell them what the Germans are. Be sure to add that we follow close behind you."

"Carry him, bound, beyond our lines," he commands the soldiers. "Start him on the road to Paris and see that he does not turn back, but say the order is, he must not be killed."

Having spoken in his own tongue, he translates his words into French, addressing the boy, and continues:

"You are to go to Paris—To tell what you have seen—How we burn and kill and mutilate—Let Parisians know what to expect when we get there.— Go!"

IV

IN PARIS, we had been receiving only official news, brief accounts of resistance in the north and victory in the east. To offset this, there were vague, disquieting rumours, whose origin could never be traced; those who believed them were branded as pessimists, those who passed them on were upbraided as no better than traitors. The

truth, when it came, fell upon us with appalling suddenness.

Having gone to Paris to secure a passport or a certificate of nationality from my Embassy, and being like most Americans in that I had no identification papers worth mentioning, I was told I must wait until "military exigencies" should allow my return to Verviller. Telegrams I handed in at various post-offices were refused for sundry reasons; and the letters I wrote to Paul remained unanswered. This uncertainty, this separation, this absence of information about the boy, made me unhappy, but did not rouse my concern.

I had put up at a small hotel just back of the Chamber of Deputies, where I dined regularly with an old retired colonel, now doing office work at the Ministry of War and hoping to be rewarded with the command of a regiment. We made life as pleasant as we could, given the circumstances.

One evening, as we sat as usual, and he was telling me of his garden in the east of France and what he would plant there "next spring," several English people who had left an hour before, with their luggage, returned in confusion. At the Gare du Nord, an interpreter had told them all trains were stopped at Creil, because of the German advance. The railroad officials would neither confirm nor deny; some travellers decided to go on, others preferred to await developments in Paris.

"That interpreter ought to be led out and shot for creating a panic with false reports!" thundered the colonel.

To this day, I have never been sure whether or not he spoke in all innocence.

But the very next night I saw him far from our table, seated with three ladies. The dining-room was filled

with grime-stained strangers. On his way out, he spoke to me:

"My wife and daughter, with a friend. Got here only a few minutes ago. Took me by surprise. As the Germans were about to enter our village, a captain who knows me went and tore them from the house. They would never have fled—my wife and my daughter are both of the blood of soldiers!" His kindly face flushed purple; the points of his white moustache, long and drooping like that of an ancient Gaul, trembled slightly as he thought of the danger they had escaped.

The situation dawned upon me only then, in all it meant for Paul, for France, for the entire world. I had believed so firmly that the good news from Alsace meant the war was being won! I had been told so often that if the French army, supported by a small English land force while the British fleet controlled the Channel, could but hold in Alsace for the first few days, victory would be assured in the "short and terrible war" about which experts agreed!

I began a weary and fruitless search through all places in Paris and the environs where refugees might stop, ill-starred and unoffending victims of a merciless onslaught and an insatiable hate. My mission held out little hope. But what else could I do; and who could have consented to do nothing?

One scene I recall with particular vividness; not that it was more cruel than others of its kind, but because it was then I synthetised a thought I have never since driven from me.

Late in the night, I entered the waiting-room of I don't know what small suburban station. Old men, women, and children sat or lay upon the floor or on the

scant hand-luggage representing what remained to them in the world. Between them, there was not one inch of space to spare. All were dirty and travel-worn, all were depressed into the immobility of sleep, though many were beyond sleep. From fragile old people who had done with all life save its suffering, down through their juniors who a few days before had been in hale and prosperous middle-age, down to wasted and dispirited babies stretched weak and half-sick upon young mothers' knees, they sat or lay or drooped, silent, all but lifeless, totally indifferent to present discomfort as to privations and sacrifices in the near past, to trials and perplexities which were the sum of what the future had to offer them. It was an appalling sight, evoking another which somehow seemed less horrible—the Hall of the Dead in the museum at Pompeii, the clay of people who had suffered and died, whereas these had suffered and now lived on only to suffer more.

As always, I scanned the faces, searching for Paul or a friend of Paul's; and I stumbled, like a blinded man, into the outer night, gasping for clean air, for clear vision, for an unstained thought in my overwhelmed soul.

I murmured then a prayer which since has been often on my lips and oftener in my heart. It was not the sort of prayer to which my philosophy had accustomed me. It was the inspired prayer of the English prophet who saw beyond the very image evoked by his genius. In my craving for the triumph of right, for the damnation of evil, my cry was Kipling's: "Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet—Lest we forget!"

When I had abandoned my useless search, when I had lost all save remembrance and grief, it was Paul who found me.

His story, as spread in military circles by the officers

who had befriended him, and confirmed by others to whom they had spoken, represented him as sobbing ceaselessly. I understand that, thus related, it drew tears from many. Yet the truth was more terrible. He left a state of half-stupor long enough to talk fully to me, just once; he appeared almost natural then, especially while dealing with incidents which had impressed him least. But, the excitement of speaking once past, he was abandoned, woe-stricken, indifferent to thought and to pain; giving scarcely a sign of life save for his faint, irregular breathing and that awful, fixed, haunted stare which time has since driven from his eyes but which all eternity cannot efface from my heart. Such physical relief as he needed had been given him; but before his moral condition I was helpless.

Meanwhile, the untamed and hitherto irresistible horde from the north was sweeping on. Paris, with only a rampart of superannuated forts, could not defend herself, though she might be defended. Resistance was feverishly organised, regiments were grouped, houses evacuated, trenches dug and earthworks thrown up. The government, to avoid being cut off by an attack drawing hourly nearer, had left with its archives; and funds from the banks, and treasures from the museums, had been rushed by train and by motor south and south-east, south-west and west.

Printed placards in the streets advised citizens that railroad transportation would be at their disposal for three days, but that Paris would hold out. Crowds thousands strong stood in line for hours, to get numbers which would entitle them to wait hours longer in other lines, and secure third-class tickets for cattle-cars—privileges being abolished at this climax of national peril.

A fair number of people stayed, either believing they

would not be disturbed by the Prussians, or else being prey to a calm despair mightier than fear. Some recalled the occupation a generation before, and declared it had been orderly. But others whispered of information which had reached the Ministry of War, the fate reserved for Paris as traced out in notes found on the bodies of German officers: how the city was to be burned systematically, district by district, after all articles of value had been stolen; how murders and mutilations were to be visited, for purposes of terrorisation, upon harmless and defenceless citizens.

Of all the wild rumours engendered at the period, this, which was among the truest, was the most readily rejected. Who could credit such infamies of officers and gentlemen, whether Prussian or not? War was hell, of course; but men of culture were not devils.

This is not a history of the war, nor a technical treatise of any sort; it is the plain story of one among the myriads whose course of thought and of life was changed by the world-cataclysm. But what put an end to the death carried in the heart of an entire race, what brought promise of a renewed and re-inspired life, was the winning of the Marne. How, therefore, should I not add my word to the maze of assertions and contradictions which have striven to befog that victory, a miracle in its way, perhaps, but a carefully prepared and minutely executed miracle, whose springs, deftly concealed, worked exactly as foreseen? Not prepared, the victory of the Marne? It is true that the error made by the Germans themselves in hesitating opened a swift door for opportunity. But what would that have availed, without Joffre's preparation?

During those most tragic days, a man in authority addressed to me words which, while not betraying a trust,

were full of moment then and have been illuminating to me since. For they showed how far into the future the leaders of France had sounded. Nor am I writing now only in what is ironically termed the light of subsequent events. I have before me a memorandum of the period, from which I copy as follows:“. . . prophesied to me that Prussian military prestige would reach its highest point by the 6th of September and that, whatever had been accomplished by Prussia up to then, she would pay so heavy a price for all she might do afterwards, that her star would steadily wane.”

He knew, on that night of the 2nd September, what I did not, could not know and did not learn until much later: that the plans for the Marne were made long in advance, that the retreat from Charleroi was no sooner begun than France's immortal commander-in-chief sent out his first order of the day, to be followed by others in logical sequence, building up step by step the mighty battle he had designed, counting upon the matchless flexibility of the French army to turn and stand and fight and win when the moment should come.

If they could but have known, those soldiers in blue and red, and those in khaki, as they retreated in an unflagging spirit of valour and resolution and self-sacrifice, but with despair and disaster hovering about their undaunted heads! If they could but have known, as they saw the ruin advancing in their wake! The French suffered for their beloved soil, invaded and laid waste; but the English were giving their blood for a land not their own and for a cause which only later appeared plainly as their own. How they fought and died for honour, for principle, for generosity, those soldiers forming the sturdy flower of the British army! May a modern Homer arise some day,

worthy to relate such epics as the stand of the Coldstream Guards at Landrecies and the death of such boys as Archer Windsor-Clive: how, fighting with their handful of men to hold the town against heaviest odds until their division was safe, and fulfilling their mission to the end, they live more than those who survived.

My friend also asked me a question which was, in a way, a prophecy. Suppose, he said, a long war must be expected; a war of wear-and-tear and of endurance, in which moral qualities would count for more than the physical, in which military effectiveness and economic organisation would have equal weight: would America, if not an active participant, rise to the test of time and of occurrences for economic and financial help, for brotherly aid? I swore that she would, and more; and I gave for my faith reasons which, by the grace of God and to the credit of man, have not been belied by the part my country has since played.

The dull glow of an afternoon sun whose rays were cut off by houses across the street, reached us as I sat near the bed on which Paul lay. The room, with the sitting-room next to it, was in one of those exceptionally low entresols found in some of the older Parisian houses; the windows were half-moons which formed the crown of the ground-floor windows, and their top barely reached my watch-chain when I stood up. At best, such light is trying; with that peculiar, deadened, reflected glow added by the houses opposite, the effect was gruesome.

"I feel as if I were in prison once more," Paul said softly. It was by accident that I caught the words; they did not rise above a murmur.

"We shall get other quarters," I rejoined.

"I don't mind," he said. "Indeed, I rather like it. Those days were calm and restful."

While he had not moved, and lay as limp as ever with his bandaged feet and injured arm, he seemed more himself than at any moment since rejoining me.

Leaving the bed he walked to and fro, weakly, for several minutes. By an evident effort of will, his movements gained firmness. He saw with surprise some new clothes and soft shoes I had bought and asked him to try on the day before; he had been unaware of them. He put them on now, expressing pleasure; and presently went into the sitting-room where he dropped into an arm-chair, with his elbow on the table. I followed him. As that dull, ghastly light shone on us from beneath, he looked aged, weary with the weight of time and knowledge; his eyes had no spark left, his voice was colourless as he said:

"Yes. I like to remember those prison-days. Beautiful silence—and thoughts which weren't hideous."

At odd moments, we had heard people pass in the street. Their footfalls altered, took on new accents, stopped and then pressed on in one same, though confused, direction. A low murmur rose, becoming quickly sharper. Shots rang out, dry, rapid, furious, from many directions at once.

"Here—already?" Paul exclaimed. He had brightened; complete energy had come; he sprang up and snatched his hat from the back of the door. "Let's go out. Better be among the first; one doesn't see so much."

"It's only a *Taube*," I said. "They come almost daily, at this hour."

"Oh! Then I should like to look at it."

"You are safer in the house," I ventured.

He smiled:

"*Tauben* are beautiful to look at when the sun shines on them!"

To please him, I went down; and perhaps to please myself too. For though I had counselled prudence, I must confess that I had been going, like any other fool, to see this sight on previous days.

While vain puffs of smoke left the roofs of administrative buildings and futile shots were fired from rifles in the streets, the hostile aeroplane soared over our heads, glowing with rainbow colours, like a gorgeous bird against the clear sky; but the beak was sinister, for those who looked closely.

The crowd about us watched with angry protests, but without sign of fear. It had become known, by now, that such visits did no extensive damage; and I suspect that the populace even underestimated the possible harm. I shall not be credited with accuracy in stating one fact, I know; yet I actually saw ladies, on several different days before the exodus began, raise their sunshades as *Tauben* passed, and cry out to their children to come under the protecting silk.

Grim and vulture-like in the greyness of twilight, the aeroplane drifted away.

That night we wandered through streets quite dark, save for rare veiled lights at windows, or flashes as military motors passed at reckless speed. In the resolute blackness, spots, denser than their surroundings, would mark men and women. The Chamber of Deputies, where the last word of party strife seemed to have been spoken, rose a solid, desolate mass against the sky. But as we crossed the bridge, the moon part-cleared herself of silvery mists and brought out veiled reliefs of river, of quays and para-

pets, of tree-fringed banks where pale granite lurked in patches hemmed by shade; before us spread the great Place de la Concorde, smooth and lifeless as a stagnant sea; above us stretched serene, unbounded skies, specked with white clouds on which search-lights rested and shimmered and glided afield. But we alone looked on this, Paul and I; we seemed the only souls in a city immemorially dead; we had come back from another age to behold what had once been, and to feel that, from our kind, none lived on as witnesses.

Surrounded by these symbols of death or passiveness, I made my appeal to Paul. Although the Germans had started a turning movement, the city's position was as perilous as ever, menaced either by envelopment or by a junction of the forces from the east with those from the north. The civilian rush was over, the last train officially put at the disposal of the people had gone; but one of my friends had helped me to secure a special permission to leave with Paul by a military train for Bordeaux, and I wished to go next morning.

Paul heard me out, and spoke:

"I want to stay. That escape from Verviller crushes me. I should have died with the rest. You are safe as a neutral, aren't you? Then mayn't we stay? I couldn't bear to live after running a second time."

Had they not bound him—I argued—and was not his arm still sore, as well as his feet? Had not strict orders been given that harm should not come to him? Was it possible that he had thought of the most contemptible form of cowardice, that rush to voluntary death proper to weak evaders of responsibilities who court lesser resistance?

Of my objections, he met only one: he was already much

better, and what did a scratched arm amount to, or a couple of bruised heels?

The search-light whose shaft spanned the heavens over our heads melted away into the moon-mistiness; those to all sides, farther off, melted away too, into the dim sheen. Their swift shafts would revive and shoot out, ending suddenly upon a cloud in clear, radiant, lens-like shape, for just an instant; and then would again die. But in all the still, deserted city, none save Paul and I seemed to heed.

His room was empty, next morning, when I got up at my usual hour. Downstairs, the trim, pleasant, fair-haired manageress told me that Paul had breakfasted before seven, and gone out.

From the first, when he had staggered in ill and dazed and half starved, able to say not much more than my name, she had taken a maternal interest in him; now his story was known, she felt professional pride that the hero of such adventures should lodge at the Hôtel de l'Ile de France. Though her husband, the cook, and all the regular waiters and men-servants were mobilised, she had, with the help of her sister, re-formed a staff and assured so good a service that we were scarcely aware of the city's plight. Our worst privation had been want of milk for our early coffee, on just two days.

"You intend to stay, M. Aubret?" she asked.

"I shall make up my mind to-night," I answered. "Will you keep open?"

"We expect to." Cool and self-possessed, she entered a small item in the book; her sister knitted quietly near by. "One never knows among such events. Our project is to remain open while we have guests."

One of these last entered, wishing change for a hundred-franc note. She gave him smaller notes, emptied the till of its silver, and, not finding enough, took a ten-franc gold piece unhesitatingly from her own purse. Done so simply, and at such a time, it was magnificent.

I wandered out. The street was empty save for a newsboy huskily whispering the name of his sheet, since a police order forbade crying.

"This must be bad for business," I remarked.

"Ruinous," he said flegmatically, with a nod to thank me for the quadruple price I paid him.

Near the corner, in an odd angle formed by two house-fronts, I found the ancient newspaper woman of the quarter. Her wares to-day consisted of but three or four papers, all the others now appearing in Lyon or Toulouse or Bordeaux. Yet she showed unmistakable satisfaction as she buttered a crust with the aid of a knife-blade worn down to a bodkin.

"You are not leaving?" I asked.

"No, my commerce would suffer."

"You are not afraid?"

"What would be the use?" Philosophically she cut off a tiny slice from her crust, and slipped it between her yellowed, shaking teeth. For a moment or two she chewed with an agitation of deep wrinkles. Her shrunken eyes observed my hand: "You don't want a paper, to-day?"

Rebuked, I took a specimen of each.

Intense heat had already descended; unendurable as it had rendered recent days, it had waxed more appalling than ever. A faint haze hung, as over an African plain, on the wide, untenanted streets. At times, a passer; often in mourning, always preoccupied; occasionally

hurrying, cowering, muttering—as if mad. Characters drawn by Gavarni or described by Balzac had poured from attics and cellars undusted and unvisited, probably, since that period, and were loose in a world quite strange to them. But even among these, one might note as with their sane brothers and sisters, who came and vanished like them, an all-pervading gentleness. So they would pass; and much time would slip on towards the mysterious ends of fate before others followed; and again there would be the desert stillness of broad avenues and streets whose nakedness lent them vast length. I have seen Paris in hours of idle merriment and in festive garb when a King or an Emperor was her guest; I have seen her at toil and at leisure, thronged with visitors or agitated by labour unrest; but never under joy or triumph, under utility or relaxation, under peace or anger, have I seen her stones so proud, so noble, so justly dignified, so supremely beautiful, as in her hour of impending immolation.

Paul met me at lunch; he was uncommunicative. When we went to our rooms, he said:

“I tried to enlist. The officers told me I must wait. One was very kind and talked to me quite a lot; wanted to know what was wrong with my arm and my feet. He said the best thing I could do was to keep out of the way of the Germans until I was ready to fight them.”

“And so——”

“And so I was wrong,” Paul concluded.

V

OUR train, bearing us away from the city of vast calm and loneliness unutterable, was reserved for wounded soldiers and for conscripts. The wounded were not yet in evidence; conscripts, like healthy children, were heard

even more than seen. One youth, particularly, kept his neighbours merry with gay words and snatches of song when we lost time by the way, stopping half an hour here or an hour there, and hundreds poured out beside the track to "see why we weren't going." To those who complained, he observed that he was happier on a sandbank than he would be in a swamp. To another who asked if he liked the prospect of being shot, the boy answered that he would probably be dead in a hundred years, so why worry? He started a jig to display the advantages of hob-nailed boots; but for these, he was still in civilian dress; and, having torn his trousers while chasing a bee into a bush, he remarked that the paternal government had breeches waiting for him at his *dépôt* that very night—so, once more, why worry?

It seemed doubtful, however, if any of us should get anywhere before the next day. Although our speed was the military rate of sixteen miles an hour, our stops were so frequent that at the end of seven hours we had covered only fifty miles; and those of us who had three or four hundred miles to go saw that our provisions would not hold out. At the stations, nothing was obtainable save water, and that only if one had luck. For the wounded or soldiers in uniform, ladies served bread, fruit, chocolate, and hot coffee from Red Cross kitchens.

Often, troop-trains passed us while we waited in mid-country. When they proved to be English, there would be wild cheering. French troop-trains were greeted with cheers too, but more soberly; only when they displayed at the windows tree-branches hung out, according to custom, by recruits, would ours grow noisy; the leaves that passed us were already withering, like our own. Sometimes gay shouts died suddenly in the throats that

uttered them, when the roadside unexpectedly revealed a dreary procession of refugees with haggard faces and spare, pathetic bundles. Paul would gaze upon these until they disappeared, and then would turn away, not speaking and not hearing if spoken to.

Twelve hours of travelling brought us to Orléans. Paul's pinched features and colourless lips showed me that fatigue, or the heat and the crowding, caused him pain; though his arm was almost well, his feet were still in bad condition. I told him to keep our places while I made a dash for the restaurant. It had been closed, but bread and wine and water were for sale in a room farther on. A soldier blocked the entrance, turning his back to it as he watched a comrade on the platform. The crowd, from behind me, pressed on; our train was liable to start at any moment, without warning.

"If you are not going in, may I pass?" I asked.

"No! I won't let you pass! Soldiers first!" he exploded. His face was burned red, his eyes were blood-shot, his hair and moustache were full of dust and stained by smoke.

Finally I succeeded in getting back to the train with a loaf of sour bread and a quart of vinegary white wine. I had secured also a bottle of water, but on the platform an officer took it from me, saying simply, "For a soldier."

Some of our fellow-travellers had left the compartment, and others had come; from this point on, the train was open to the unprivileged. Next to me sat a refined, sweet-looking young woman with three small children including a tiny baby. The children were so white and quiet, and she was so drawn and weary, that I asked her a frank question or two.

They had been on the way since the day before, and their

food had given out; she and the children had had no morsel to eat since dawn. She explained very simply that the crush before all refreshment-rooms was so great that she could not struggle there with her babies; and she dared not take them out of a station, nor leave them in the train, because there was no schedule for stopping or starting; and unless she met her husband as agreed at Tours that night, she might never meet him again and would not know what to do.

Among us, we were able to give her and the children all they needed.

A handsome, fair-haired, well-dressed boy of sixteen had taken a vacant place next to Paul; he alone offered nothing. Paul asked when he had last eaten, and learned that his case was similar to the lady's though he had tried fighting the crowd and had failed. By now, all we had left for dinner was one chicken sandwich and what I had just bought; we gave him the sandwich and divided the remainder in three. He accepted with a simplicity which seemed all the more graceful when, shortly after, he took out a heavy silver cigarette case and offered us gold-tipped Egyptian cigarettes.

"I don't remember when I slept last," he suddenly remarked, with drooping eyelids. "If I'm sleeping when we reach Tours, and you happen to be awake, will you rouse me?"

Whereupon, with the complete faith of youth, he fell asleep sitting upright; and was roused by Paul some hours later. He left us then, as did the mother and the small children.

An elderly lady with two tall daughters, a consumptive son-in-law, and a grandson of twelve, crowded into our compartment, bringing at least a dozen bags and packages

besides a huge bandbox and three dogs. All the family were in the last stages of exhaustion, and very dirty. They had put on their best clothes for flight, and wore much jewellery, including diamonds of considerable value; the unmarried daughter had on a hat with big ostrich plumes sticking upright, probably worth many pieces of gold when washed.

"We are Belgian refugees who had gone to Paris for safety; and see where we are now!" the elderly lady said. "We had to abandon our trunks at the station, and though we had plenty of money, first-class tickets were refused us. Sixty-seven hours spent in a cattle-box, packed in on wooden benches, unable to wash or to stretch, unable to get out to buy food, for we were locked in! The horrors of that unseemly journey: men, women, children. . . ."

Through what was left of the night, they slept solidly. Soon after daybreak, the married daughter left us with her husband, the boy, and the largest of the dogs. The boy was so drunk with sleep that, when told to kiss his grandmother good-bye, he solemnly held out his hand and said he was glad to meet her. At Angoulême, we were able to get our first decent food and hot coffee since starting from Paris—for Paul and myself, twenty-four hours, for these refugees, three entire days and nights. When the train was once more on its way, I learned incidentally that, upon reaching Angoulême, all that had remained as provisions to these ladies was one bunch of grapes, and a small phial of water they had saved for the dogs.

Their turn came, to leave us; and the aspect of the travellers changed. Invalid soldiers arrived in hordes. Ill rather than wounded, most seemed to be; few showed bandages of any sort, and when these appeared, they were on arms or feet.

The man next to me was weak and emaciated; said a fragment of shell had struck him in the side and hurled him a distance of six yards. The skin had not been broken, but the nervous shock had been such that he couldn't recover.

"Never was so well taken care of as in the hospital," he went on. "But I couldn't stay in bed, couldn't keep still. So they're letting me go home to my wife in Marseille. Get dizzy when I stand or walk or try to lift anything. Never was strong; had been discharged from the army, because of my poor constitution; but when the war came I wanted to carry my musket once more and face the enemy, though it shouldn't be for more than one day. I'd held through four days of hard fighting when I got knocked out. Won't have to fight again, but I can say I've done something."

We stopped at a station. Nurses came to ask if they needed anything. Hot coffee and grapes were distributed, bread was offered and refused.

"Everybody was so kind to us this morning, that we all ate too much!" the soldiers chorused.

I could not help thinking of the young mother and three children of the night before.

My friend reached for his provision-bag and drew out a filthy glass which he held to the spout of a coffee-pot, and then gravely emptied.

"Disgusting, the way we eat and drink!" he observed to me. "We get so dirty that we're used to it, and don't even mind. Seemed quite natural for me to drink out of that glass. But as I finished, I said to myself, 'Wouldn't my wife catch it, if she dared give me such a glass at home!'" Laughing, he tore his coat open. On this sweltering day he wore the full French uniform of blue

cloth outer coat, beneath it a tight-fitting cloth tunic, a cotton shirt under that, and a flannel shirt against his skin. The last two garments were stained brown and black. "My wife will scream when she sees this! I can't change or have them washed, because I haven't got anything else to put on. They pretend to wash them, in the regiment, but it's only steam-bleaching and disinfecting. Do you think we mind? No—not once we've got used to it!"

"Wonder why the English aren't the same?" a Gascon soldier asked meditatively. He was big, burly, enthusiastic, with round cheeks and bright dark eyes. "They're spick-and-span. Don't know how they manage. Never saw anything like their equipment; and as for their food—why, it's like going to the hotel!"

By now, the compartment was filled beyond standing-room, and the convalescents talked merrily about the war as over, for them, and very near its end anyhow. Absolute victory was assured, of course. They argued as to whether the decisive engagement would come at the beginning of October, or only at the close. One hazarded the opinion that it might not come before November. The faces of his comrades clouded, as they roundly rebuked him for a pessimist.

Our approach to Bordeaux dispelled such gloomy thoughts. The Gascon made a leap across various feet and knees to reach the window, and waved frantically.

"The wife of Alphonse, at the door of his house!" he cried to us. "When she sees me, she will know her man is well!" He ended with a wild shout; she recognised him, and waved gladly. Twenty yards beyond, there was some one else to be greeted. At a street crossing where we halted, he caused an old man nearly to die of fright by

grasping his hand violently, and shouting into his ear that his son was safe.

We rolled into the station. Soldiers streamed from the train, emigrants followed; our conscripts had long since left us. An Italian boy stood weeping because his bicycle could not be found. Officials demanded passes from Frenchmen and passports from foreigners. The calling of cabmen and the whistling of newsboys reached us. And we knew that we were in the improvised capital.

The famous author who has described desperate revels under the Mask of the Red Death would have understood Bordeaux, I think, better than those who have been scornful or righteous on the subject. The sham pleasure found there in mockery of fate, and in blindness of existing conditions, had the quality of a last resolve to perish lightly.

Looking back upon those days, they appear the most unreal in all our experiences; certainly the most evanescent before efforts of memory. Yet there we witnessed, beside episodes to make one despair, others which gave early intimation of the heights to which the nation would rise under prolonged adversity.

One Sunday, towards the end of September, I went to keep an appointment, at noon, with a Cabinet Minister in the public building improvised for his use. Our talk was to be short, coming immediately before lunch; and I was surprised to be kept waiting in the large bare hall which served as ante-room. The stately head usher, in impeccable evening dress with a handsome chain of cut steel round his neck, presided at a battered old table, and could offer me only a choice between two arm-chairs whose silk was so tattered and the lining so soiled that I preferred

to stand. Yet somehow he was no less grand than when last I had seen him in Paris, surrounded by the luxury of one of the Republic's most splendid palaces.

"The Council of Ministers is not ended," he said, observing that I consulted my watch; I had wondered if I were forgotten. The *huissier* added: "Ah! I think I hear the Minister."

With velvet tread, he left me. A moment later, the door was thrown open majestically.

The cabinet I entered was large, and becomingly furnished, with some of the objects removed from Paris to escape the Germans, perhaps. But I had no thought for this at the time. My attention was drawn at once to the tall figure in the long black coat, standing near the desk, with bowed head and stooping shoulders, holding listlessly a morocco portfolio as if it had been forgotten there in his hand. He did not hear my step, and did not move as I advanced. I stopped. The slight noise of the door closing upon the usher made him raise his head. The face was haggard, the eyes were dimmed with tears.

"They have destroyed Reims!" He looked towards me an instant, and looked away; his words had come slowly, his voice had been hoarse and not more than just audible.

As I started, unable to believe, and not finding a phrase to express the amazement, the indignation which rose within me, he spoke again:

"*Ils nous ont détruit Reims!* The news came while we sat in Council. The telegrams are here!"

With his right hand he struck the portfolio he held in his left. He continued, more and more quickly and clearly as he progressed:

"They bombarded the Cathedral, and wrecked it, from

vengeance, without strategic necessity or excuse; they bombarded the other monuments of the town, systematically, mercilessly. The fate of Reims may be worse than that of Louvain. And I repeat it—no strategic motive! I know the orders we had given; I know the measures taken. I declare to you upon my honour, as a Cabinet Minister, that not a tower was used militarily; we had but our wounded in the Cathedral, and theirs too. The Germans knew this. No excuse—only vengeance! And the proof of what I tell you is here.”

His hands trembling, his voice quivering, he began to draw papers from his portfolio.

I went out into a town which did not yet know of this latest crime against the dead, against the living, against all that are to be; the ruin of this gem of line and colour, of architecture and rose-windows, this sublime and intensely beautiful Reims.

But as I saw the news break, first with incredulity, then with extreme fury, I saw, too, the spirit of France begin to change: I saw that Frenchmen had grasped the nature of their war. What the havoc in Belgium, the north, and Lorraine had prepared, what the winning of the Marne and the turn of the Aisne had confirmed, the bombardment of Reims concluded.

There was no further exaggeration of what might be accomplished; but panic and despair vanished from men's thoughts. Calm and balance being restored, those already brave became resolute; most of the weak became brave, and the rest were so effectively driven to the wall that they vanished from reckoning. Firm rather than rash, proud but not haughty, dignified without trace of arrogance, France started, in a complete solidarity which knew no faltering, to retrieve her disasters—to make good

her honour—to contribute if need were her last conceivable resource, her every drop of manly blood, in defence of re-awakened ideals.

We left Bordeaux, and its strange, artificial life; we travelled, without an objective as without a home. The thought of the war brooded upon Paul's spirits like a great-winged bird of evil omen obscuring the sun and the skies, yet he was restless when out of touch with those who had done the fighting. Constant change of scene and of people was all I could devise for his relief. We were in Marseille when the first British troops arrived from India and we saw the generous-hearted local population go madly enthusiastic over the natives while we ourselves were thrilled by the calm, the dignity, the practical good-sense, and the deep-lying, unemotional patriotism of the officers. We were at Cette for the landing of French black troops, their brightly coloured uniforms grouping in strangely unexpected pictures on the otherwise deserted quays. We were in various trains bound for all sorts of places, casting our lot with convalescent soldiers and listening as they yarned their adventures.

Paul tells me I was closely watched, most of the time, by a big man with a long, fair beard and blue eyes which saw sideways—a secret agent, evidently. What might I be about, indeed, an old foreigner wandering all over the country in company of a French boy unrelated to him but passed off as a nephew? A multitude of excellent people behind the lines felt, at the time, that they must do something patriotic besides talking; and spy-chasing supplied both excitement and notoriety. I don't doubt but it was an exceptionally virtuous victim of the disease called acute espionitis who originally drew the attention of

a minor official to my case. What surprises me is the facility with which I was granted all the visas I demanded. Perhaps it was so that I might compromise both myself and my accomplices thoroughly. When Paul, after some anxious days during which he had observed while keeping his own counsel, confided in me at last, and drew my attention to the man who had made himself my shadow, I went promptly back to Marseille, intending to reach Paris if possible. This unforeseen return allowed us to connect with a letter we had otherwise missed. It brought news that Paul's father lay gravely wounded in a Versailles hospital; it gave me a reason for leaving a region where my presence might well appear unjustified, and going where it was imperative that my ward and I should be.

Convalescent wounded were travelling back in great numbers. The character they revealed was cheering and the impressions to be gathered from them were invigorating blasts. Never have I seen such earnestness and simplicity as in these men wearing shabby uniforms and shapeless boots, who liked to talk best of what their comrades, not they themselves, had done; who pretended to no extensive knowledge or unusual prowess; and who, sore from half-healed wounds, often went foodless.

When we neared Lyon, all the compartments were crowded; in ours, there was not standing-room, nor in the corridor giving access to it. At one station, a tiny, red-faced, fair-haired soldier hurled himself in. Struggling and elbowing, he spat foul curses at the soldiers who advised him to seek a place elsewhere.

A tall, slim, particularly nice-looking young infantryman, wearing a marvellously shabby uniform and an indescribable cap, told him to behave decently, at least;

whereupon the little soldier struck the infantryman. The row degenerated into a fight; the invader tried to draw his bayonet; other soldiers joined in.

"Be careful—don't hurt him—he's ill!" cried out the man who had received the first blow.

"Yes, yes!" chorused the others, grappling with him as gently as they might, and ejecting him, even yet with calmness and method, upon the platform. A window-pane had been broken in the process, but no one was hurt.

"Drunk," the word passed round, while the first infantryman whispered to Paul: "Yes—perhaps one glass too much. But he's insane, too. More men have gone mad in this war than anybody knows."

A second infantryman spoke:

"He would have been shot for this, in the army zone. Now, he will only be sent to prison."

"No. Nothing will be done to him, I hope. He didn't know he was striking an officer." All turned to the speaker. It was the tall, nice-looking young infantryman in the shabbiest of uniforms.

"What officer?" the soldiers asked, puzzled.

"Oh, only a *sous-officier*. I'm a sergeant."

"And you let him attack you—you didn't exercise your authority——"

"Better let the thing pass. I haven't got my stripes on. If I had told him my rank and he hadn't believed it and had struck again, I should have had to order you to arrest him. I wouldn't serve a comrade so when he isn't himself. He couldn't hurt me; better to let it pass as a soldiers' row. I'm not proud. Couldn't be, with clothes like these!" He smiled as he glanced down. "You see, I was promoted on the field, and shot five minutes afterwards. They took me to the hospital, and then sent me

down here, and now I'm off to the front again, with my same old clothes and no stripes. No gold braid left; not even red for corporals. And, of course, no clothes. Look at this cap!" It was battered out of all shape and washed into many tones. "My *capote* is bad enough, isn't it, with only two buttons left? Well, look at these trousers!" He unbuttoned the coat. On his left knee was a huge triangular rent roughly pinned up; on the other leg was the mark of a small hole, to which he pointed: "This is where I was shot. Here—the left knee—a spent fragment of shell struck me with just enough force to tear the cloth without scratching me. Funny, eh?"

"What has gone wrong with the clothes supply?" Paul asked.

"Needed for the 1914 class; and men promoted to drill them, or else on the field, used up all the braid before my turn came. What does it matter? My captain tore his off. Several of our officers had been killed, while a number of men had been saved by their sacks. Only the captain and one lieutenant were left. The captain took the sack from a dead soldier lying near him, and put it on himself. Then the lieutenant was killed by several bullets at the same moment. 'That's the gold,' said the captain. And whipping out his knife, he ripped the braid from his cap and collar and sleeves. 'They have special marksmen for picking out officers,' he said. 'It's enough for me that you boys know me, and I want you to have one officer left to help you win the fight.' And we did!"

Half an hour later, while Red Cross ladies were handing in supplies at some station—the men having been without food all day, save for what Paul, being well provided for the purpose, had given them—the little mad soldier reappeared. He had lost his cap, but recovered his wits.

"Let me come in—I'm all right—I won't misbehave—I want to be with my *copains*!" he pleaded. "I've been in the next carriage, where an old lady rubbed cologne on my head. I'm all right!"

At a sign from the young sergeant without stripes, the soldiers helped him in.

"Ah, you are real French soldiers!" the ex-madman exclaimed, beginning to embrace all he could reach. "I'm taken that way sometimes—now," he concluded.

Harmony was restored; silence fell; most of the men slept. Suddenly a breezy voice exclaimed:

"Eh, thou, the *Lyonnais*!"

The second infantryman was addressing the sergeant without stripes, who had alluded, a while before, to his origin.

"Thou, the Lyonnese! I've been thinking. Try not to get up any more exhibitions in that town, wilt thou? Thy 1870 Lyon Exhibition brought us the war. Thy 1894 Exhibition got our President murdered for us. And now thy 1914 Exhibition—— Enough, enough! Don't ever go and do it again!"

After the laugh had quieted down, Paul whispered to me:

"There's a new spirit they all show. In the train from Paris to Bordeaux, it was courage and enthusiasm. Now it's better—courage and patience."

VI

WE WALKED on the red-veined marble, of which Alfred de Musset has written that a Venus sleeping in the stone shed her life-blood when mere steps were carved from her bosom; we reached the majestic avenues of the Park, dull only for those who have failed to seize the spirit of Ver-

sailles. But our thoughts were not of the place, nor of its suggestions.

It had been agreed that we should meet here after Paul's first visit to the hospital. His white cheeks and compressed lips told me rather more than was meant. For whereas I supposed Clermont dead, some slight hope lingered. Paul said so, when able to speak; and a moment later, explained his emotion:

"Father was very kind to me. Like a real father—almost." After hesitating, he added: "I don't suppose fathers are absolutely gentle as children—are they? That's why I said 'almost'."

Two bad wounds, he went on to tell me; and a complication worse than either. A body-wound, from a piece of shell now removed but followed by inflammation; and the bone of the left thigh splintered by a bullet, for which the doctors wanted to amputate.

"He won't consent, because phlebitis has developed in the other leg. The campaign did it; he was never strong, you remember. So when the doctors say he will probably die of blood-poisoning unless they take off the left leg near the hip, he answers by asking how long after that they will want to take off the right leg above the knee? I know most of this from the nurse; he's too weak to talk much."

"And her opinion——?"

"She daren't say he's wrong to resist; but she doesn't say he will live."

We had reached a broad, short avenue planted with horse-chestnuts; the double row, whose symmetry represented columns, fitted the symbol-loving taste of that day; its title was the Salle des Marronniers, for in a "hall" the King might serve open-air banquets which would have been unseemly in an "avenue." Fountains then played

on the four sides; only two stagnant basins remain, one at each end, while the length on either hand is strewn with mossgrown busts. As Paul and I walked down the gentle incline, our feet rustled upon a thick carpet of leaves glowing with garnet-hued jewels; the trees which had scattered them sighed, melancholy and unfathomable, while we trod upon their lost fruit and cast garments.

"Do you know, I am just beginning to understand father," Paul said slowly. "If we were both to live, we might get on well together. I was wrong, in much of what used to happen."

"Paul!"

"Yes. You see, our new generation is too different from his. Probably he'd been brought up very much as he wanted me to be. When I couldn't take the sort of management which had suited him, he thought I was abnormal. He was sensitive because he ought to have been higher up in the world, and he knew what had kept him down; the only single thing he had left was his honesty, and when he believed I had stained that—why! what wonder he cast me off? Besides, we mustn't forget he loved mother."

"I agree the main fault rested with her," I assented dryly.

"Oh, don't take that tone!" Paul cried, with genuine pain. "Even before she was cut down, when she had but a small idea of danger and thought only I was threatened, she wanted to protect me or to die with me. It was as if she had waked from a dream to become herself."

Judging that the solution in Clermont's case, while leaving no doubt as to its nature, might delay its coming, I took a furnished flat belonging to an officer. The house was a tall old mansion whose windows commanded an

extensive view. From my arm-chair I looked out on the horticultural gardens, erst-while the royal kitchen-gardens, with their plants and trees and green-draped walls. To my left was a group of buildings stern without loss of grace in their ancient dignity; straight before me, beyond the gardens, I caught glimpses of the lake called Swiss to commemorate the affection of the Great King's guard; to the right rose those stately Hundred Steps with the broad sweep of terrace leading to the Palace itself, whose utmost splendours, scorning the vulgarity of a town, lie south and west. There I would wait until Paul came home from the hospital, when I could not walk out in the Park.

The landscape would smile under a crisp autumn sun, or be grim under beating rain or chasing cloud; and later, revealed trees and shrubs richly glistening with coats of ice held on tiny twigs like long diamonds of rare lustre and matchless size; but it was always calm, noble, inspiring, and withal consoling. Often, a sunset of marvellous splendour would paint the skies in almost Southern hues; or else delicate beauties of the pearl would blend with mysterious fires of the opal. I have heard men wonder why Louis XIV chose Versailles as site for the palatial monument to his glories. I know that he turned his own room to the east, whence he alone received the kisses of the rising sun to which he compared himself on shields, and in frescoes, and in statuary. But I suspect he came once at sunset, and the depths which must exist in even such a nature as his bade him remain: and those colours and masses which cheered me may have brought him solace, in that old age of martial reverses, of dwindling prestige, of taxing vanity, and of irksome tyranny beneath the bigoted sway of the wife who could not be his queen.

At each return, Paul would talk briefly of his father's condition; and then, after an evident effort to say more, would plunge into another subject. I supposed anxiety to be the cause for this; but as time wore on, I saw there must be a more complex reason. It even occurred to me that Paul might have reacted against the sympathy provoked by the first view of his father at the hospital, and that he shrank from betraying himself.

But what power of mind or of soul made me feel, presently, that Paul was drifting away from me? I would feel a thought as he drove it from him—an unsounded thought I could feel and not read.

The hospital was open to visitors for only a short time each afternoon. With his father's consent and my approval, Paul had joined a society for military preparation and was furthermore taking lessons in boxing and fencing, and in the theory of war. There was already talk of calling out the class which came second before his; and although I did not seriously believe boys of seventeen or eighteen would be incorporated, I knew that he needed occupation. While no change was conspicuous in him since physical health had returned, I could see that his nerves had not recovered from the shocks received.

A messenger came for us both. We knew what was meant. Clermont had expressed the wish to see me before his end; once, when I had gone, he had seemed self-absorbed and embarrassed so that I had not gone back; but he had said, "I must have a word with you." The head-nurse was a lady I had known well in Paris, a major's wife; she had promised to warn me if possible.

All was very still. None among the patients looked towards the dying man; they were still, even to a Senegalese, whose stench filled the air and who showed his

teeth and rolled his eyes, whitish spots on a dusky skin paled to greyness under the lust of a near-by death.

The boy did not speak, but drew close and clasped the thin hand that lay upon the blanket; he bent over the helpless, all but lifeless form.

Hard and discoloured, the man's lips tried to move. Not a syllable was shaped, nor could the glassy eyes convey a meaning; but Paul understood, and took from the other hand, tightly closed, a crumpled paper.

Weary, wasted, ashen, the face, paler than the pillow against which it rested with the poor, frail, human halo of thin and faded hair, caught a gleam of light from the tall windows yawning opposite.

"Mother—mother——" the broken man said.

Was it on her he called, who had never been a mother to his son? Or was he, the dying soldier, harking back to boyhood as brave men do, and crying from his soul, as those falling on battlefields have been known to call, to the love that has known neither jealous taint nor shadow of turning?

We laid him to rest in a peaceful cemetery hard by the forest, where many loyal sons of France and of England were to be until war's alarms should cease. The short service ended, Paul and I stayed on while the wind eddied round us in whirls of light leaves and sharp rain-drops.

Paul's hand sought mine for an instant and withdrew, leaving against my palm that crumpled paper from the hospital.

The dying father had made a will bequeathing to me all he owned—his son.

On the last night of that desolate December, as Paul and I sat watching and listening, he asked me to tell him of the subject which had commanded the forty years

which might count as my active life. For me, questions of philosophy now lie buried so deep beneath the sands of physical illusion in which men put their trust, that no theory, however pure, is worth the resurrection. I may be wrong; those who have not endured the war, or those who are so constituted as to be able to endure and to forget, may think differently. But for my part, human cataclysms have shown me how remote the connection is between theory and life; how thin the illusion beside facts too immense for immediate understanding but too terrible for an instant's evasion, facts rising and mouthing and mocking us on every side. It seems to me that if art and thought are to survive, they must be both higher and truer than ever before; but, as their primordial condition for existence, they must face facts as never before in the history of men.

Yet for abuse to arise, facts must exist, as well as for use; one brings ignoble, as the other noble, proof of basic truths. It was in no spirit of apology for Germany that I spoke to Paul of the Great Law of human tendencies, distorted for the furtherance of crime:

"If we care to look deeper than the social divisions in which men are conscious of their activities, we find them subject to a twofold law of racial destiny whose character is geographical. Living his life, responding to his moods and those of others, attaining success or accepting failure, man is bound by powerful roots to the region in which he elects to think and to act, under the influence of soil.

"Each nation possessing natural rather than artificial boundaries will have as its characteristic either waterways or mountains or plains; and with this physical preponderance corresponds a human type with marked psychological qualities. Where the country is extensive and possesses

varied aspects, one type may dominate in one broad region and others elsewhere: so-called national unity then becomes more difficult to assure than where the soil provides one strong and one or two weak parties.

"Of the three types, the most highly evolved is that living on waterways. Gifted with courage, endurance, enterprise, initiative, imagination, these men are the creators, the explorers, the rulers at home and oversea. They enjoy the advantages of moisture, of freely circulating air, of extensive and ready communications: they are furthermore in nearest contact with the inner sources of the earth's waters, on which physical life depends.

"Next, comes the type living on mountains. Pure air and wide vistas may here prompt the mind to lofty purposes, but the sternness of existence develops a hard character, while difficulties of exchange lead first to narrowness of outlook and then to a spirit of compromise. Yet races that dwell on mountains attain to inspiration because they are not so remote from the earth's inner waters as might appear. For mountain lakes are often in clefts descending to the deep-hidden springs, and offering the next most direct connection, after that of open waterways.

"The type living on interior plains is the third. The struggle of these men is the hardest, their reward in beauty and in facilities the scantiest; and, lacking water-courses, atmospheric moisture, assured air-currents, their development is the most retarded. Yet the very conditions under which they must thrive, if they would live, lay solid foundations for character, and teach means for quick profiting by every chance. It has been noted that the fruit richest in water may come from the driest soil, where deep-reaching roots feel out after remote sustenance from hidden sources. So, when plains are opened under

the influence of newly turned or discovered waterways, the development of these inhabitants may be enviably rapid and sure.

"In his obedience to evolution, which he is so prone to deny whenever conscience whispers that he has not done his duty towards himself and others, man is driven to seek lands rich with waterways. Though he may pretext fortune or ambition, he is answering voices which he rarely stops to analyse. But while he may stray as he searches, he does not wander blindly in any direction. If he be brave and hardy, apt for fighting and conquering, he will be prompted to advance, ever struggling, against the direction of the earth as it revolves upon itself. When he is weakening and grows covetous rather than ambitious, he will be content to advance with the rotation, inviting a minimum of resistance.

"Where nations of their sovereign will renounced westward openings, they could injure none save themselves. Where they pursued such openings honestly, by methods recognised in law and established in precedent, the possible prejudice to others became a matter of prestige or of commercial reckoning. But all nations did not rest content with these alternatives: some, forgetful that morals count above commercial advisability or even national aspiration, claimed the right to opportunity without observance of those elementary honesties which are demanded, as a condition for esteem, from collectivities as from individuals. The nation which, desiring greatness, wantonly plans the sacrifice of others, her moral equals or betters, merely because she wishes to expand, is on the level of the man who, feeling the call of genius but lacking means to assure his fame, would murder and rob inoffensive fellow-citizens to buy himself opportunity. . . .

"The study of evolution, so sedulously practised in Germany, has not only established the progress of life on earth, it has proved how far back in the past our human roots are planted. Just as a touch of nature makes the whole world kin, so a touch of primæval savagery sufficed to make the whole world war."

A strange New Year crept upon us.

The streets were darkened and silent; there had been a moon the night before, but it was lost beyond masses of cloud which had deluged us with rain unceasingly for well-nigh twenty-four hours.

During some little while, the rain seemed to slacken; silence and blackness filled all life. Church-clocks began to strike, and others took up the burden, as though we had been at any hour of any day or night. There were not more bells than usual; rather fewer, for the rain drowned those afar. Silence fell again, and lasted a score of seconds. Not men broke it, nor works of men's hands, but the heavens themselves, as the flood-gates were opened afresh.

On the eve of Christmas, we had heard feet and voices in the streets; bells had pealed loud and triumphant, while we saw lights shine out beneath us, bright stars in the gloom of an earth-sky. We knew, then, though we did not realise so fully as now by contrast, that those bells had signalled a consecration, that those feet and voices had marked the way of church-goers.

No peals, no prayers, no consecration to usher in the prophecy of New Year: and yet, perhaps clearer from the absence of physical testimony, the spirit of God seemed very near for any who would heed.

We spoke of that as we parted, Paul and I—he to sleep, and I to wake.

I did not dream: for what I saw was true.

The world had lived on through the years. I shall not state how many; nor could I count them surely, though I knew.

War had succeeded war, ambition had defeated ambition, jealousy had devoured jealousy, self-interest had preyed upon self-interest; while material gain, material prestige, material supremacy, were sought by men and groups of men.

Whether struggling westward or sinking east, races and nations had given the measure of their morality in conflicts which meant death or re-birth for all engaged, and weakening or hardening for all that abstained because of cowardice or of egoism. Men groped in the depths of an infinite night; and the wisest could but say that the right must be no less eternally right than before, the wrong no less eternally wrong, though physical nature had fallen as a veil between them and the first, while connecting with the second.

Then there came an age when men dared seek the truth; and there came an age when men dared speak the truth; and there came an age when men dared face the truth: and a Prophet appeared.

He spoke from his heart to those about him; he used neither artifice nor violence to bring proselytes beneath his sway. His words were for such as would hear: and they were old as worlds that are, they were sure as worlds to be.

He taught a simple message of love; not remote love for strangers where the effort cost least, but love for those with whom one's life was cast; he taught that hearts should be filled with love for all the children of God, since to love them was to love Him, and hatred or scorn for the least among them was hatred or scorn for Him in their persons.

He taught that all bitterness must pass away from the mind, that the stain of slander must be blotted from the lips; that harsh judgments, though easy to frame and though perchance just, were ever harmful to him that uttered them; he taught that the words should not be repressed, but the thoughts which led to them banished.

He taught that eternal life had two objects—knowledge and love; wherefore the lives through which men passed in tentative stages towards eternity should have these objects; but knowledge could come only with earnest desire, which was an expression of love, so the objects towards which attention was turned should be worthy of love.

He taught that where the bases of a work were solid and its message was true, it need not fear harm from evil existing near; that the temples of Greece, the pillars and arches of Rome, cared nothing for the dust men shook from their feet in passing, nor did those who looked upon them even in their ruins take heed for that dust, if capable of seeing more than dust. He taught that only the beautiful and the true should be sought, those things which might be loved, and, being loved, might prompt to greater love; that hardness should not be crushed from the heart, but allowed to melt away in the warm rays of the love which asked but to become the guiding factor in thought: that hardness was only love grown cold, to crush was to condense it, to warm was to retrieve it.

The Prophet bore many names, for he was many men; nor was he mocked and cursed and stoned, for evolution had prepared his way wherever a life had accepted simplicity and good-faith as its law and had taken as its inspiration love—the love of God in His majesty—the love of God in all His children—the love of God in all His works.

Yea, a strange, sad New Year; but not a hopeless one. In the morning, Paul and I saw the sun pierce the clouds for two brief moments:—while, rosy-pink and cream-yellow, above the winter-stripped gardens and tossing tree-branches, the palace of France's traditional glories smiled transfigured in calm beauty against granite-hued skies.

In each life, I believe, there is a period sacred beyond others, which one may shrink from discussing even with those concerned. Such, to me, was the time Paul and I spent in Versailles. The sacredness came from the fact that there were no events nor incidents, but only harmony and understanding, while he worked in many ways and I helped him as I could. We were nearing the end of our days together; we were reaching phases of our respective existences to be given to other tasks than any we had known.

On his seventeenth birthday, he entered my room. His eyes, whose grey had been light all this while, had darkened: I knew the mood.

Throwing himself on the floor near me, one arm across my knees, his face turned to mine, he said abruptly, intensely:

"I've tried—I've tried hard, really hard—and I can't!" Tears fell; he did not try to check them. "It's not my fault; it's fate, it's the world, it's everything under all that means anything——"

"You want to leave me, Paul?" My voice came steadily.

"I can't be idle any longer—I can't wait for my class to be called! They don't want anticipated enlistments; but with the special training I owe to you—and with the

detail that I want to be a plain infantryman, the man most needed—and with your help, if you will see the officers and officials you know—I'm sure I should be taken."

Still resting as he had been, but with his head bowed on his hands, he continued:

"I told you I had ambitions—felt a call for work—in the old days, at Verviller. But if I don't do my share first to punish the worst crimes, to stop the greatest evils imaginable, do you think I should be worthy? I can't let others do the harsh and terrible work to clear the way so that I may do as I please later!"

All the influence I had was needed for the fulfilment of his wish.

From Paris, he went off to join a regiment of the line at a base in central France where it was re-forming; and I returned to the ruins of Verviller, where others were already toiling to create new life from bare ashes.

Few moments of leisure occur in such an existence as mine is now. Nevertheless, I have been recording my evidence of him whom I alone knew fully while nature, and fate, and men, and he himself were fashioning the boy to make him what he is; for I wish his story to greet him when he returns to what is left of these walls, though I may have passed in the road that knows no turning. Or am I pleading excuses for a self-sought task? Perhaps I merely would write of him, now we cannot talk together. As I write, there are times when he seems to be listening; I see him look up with his wondering smile.

VII

WHEN Paul and I met again in Verviller, I was more bent than had been my wont, and glad for that moment

only; he stood tall, erect, radiant with a serenity which no sentiment seemed to break.

Vistas of ruined streets stretched in all directions. Behind us, the river with its shattered bridge and battle-scarred banks; before us, the scaled, crumbling tower of the church, and the broken but still chimney-crowned walls of the château; to right, to left, only nameless, figureless, indescribable desolation. Some who have viewed these ruins as one of the curiosities of the war have written very picturesque accounts, I am told. To one who lived there, pen-pictures are vain.

"Was this our house?—Yes, that is your window," said Paul.

His clear eyes had not darkened, his firm cheeks had lost nothing of their flush. Perhaps his shoulders had squared themselves rather more resolutely under the uniform coat of light grey. I am sure the visor of his cap rose, and not merely because he glanced up.

"Let's go in," he said.

No hand had touched it, apparently, though many feet had passed there; it was as when the cooling fires of exhausted flames had left it to time and weather. Stone and mortar and twisted metal strewn the earth, in mounds where much had been consumed; the springs of my bed and of Paul's lay thin and discoloured in a shadowy semblance of shape, as though waiting for our ghosts to rest on them. Of whatever else had been mine, nothing was recognisable. Alone the outer walls hemmed us in, honey-combed with gaping, ungarnished doors and windows—a shell of vanity, recalling the semblance of a life, within which reigned death and corruption. At the back, metal window-shades of Venetian pattern hung down to the sills, creaking in the breeze, shamming usefulness. Whenever

they swayed, we caught fleeting glimpses of scorched trees and rank weeds where once I had taken pleasure in my small garden.

"Strange, how natural those shades seem, if one doesn't watch closely," Paul said. "And even if one does, one can't mind; it's too unreal. This isn't our house: ours is what we remember.—But what's that?"

Drawing near to one of the windows—where the kitchen had been—he exclaimed:

"The old, rusty, broken scissors Léonie put up there to keep me from coming back! You remember?"

True; there they were. And I shuddered—not superstitiously, but at the thought of the sadness that first parting had caused me.

His mood, excluding sentiment, concerned me, depressed and alarmed me, made me feel deeply alone though he was near. Since the moment we had met again, I had noted a difference without being able to gauge its span.

"Would you like to see more?" I asked.

"Yes, since I am here," he answered.

Following him, I even wondered if the events he had witnessed could, by some strange process of mind, have been wiped from his memory. His gait and bearing would soon have reminded me he was a soldier, if I had been disposed to forget; but I could not have forgotten, such was the spirit inspiring his look, his voice, his movements. All that, I understood. But his serenity bewildered me and left no grounds for reckoning, though once I had held every secret of Paul's heart and had sounded deep into his soul.

With cool interest he noted odd traces of bullets and bayonet-thrusts which, in the near-by walls, had survived the conflagration.

"That's the street fighting I told you about," he said calmly. "If anything is left of father's house, I can explain the whole action as it developed there."

I noticed that he spoke of "father's house," but had called mine "ours."

"That's shell-fire," he said presently, before the heaped vestiges of two buildings. "I saw them both go. Five shells in succession fell on or near them. Good shooting; two-hundred-and-tens, I believe. Yes, here's a small piece of one. What's left of the houses isn't worth talking about. Those over there—most of the street, indeed—got a dose of smaller shells, but quite big enough to do the business. Less damage, and extraordinary symmetry."

There was, indeed, that difference he mentioned, between the large shells which nothing resisted, and the smaller which stone and brick might partly survive. There was either fair resistance or complete crumbling on the part of masonry—no half-measures. Here, in the street he pointed out, fire had been added to the havoc of shells, but upright walls stood with emptied windows against the sky. Metal, however, seemed to cry out indignant protests, to make a last appeal against the violence of brother-metal though alien stone might accept its fate. How else explain the bars, the girders, stretched out or up from sundry piles of ruin, like arms that had risen with a curse but were frozen in death when the lips that cried out had been stilled?

I expressed this to Paul.

"Very nice," he said. "Only it was the fire did it—common incendiarism, you know."

"They smashed the church, when it ceased to serve them," he commented presently, glancing in through a window whose ancient glass had been one of the prides of

Verviller. "Just pounded to pieces from sheer wickedness, and burned by hand afterwards. Look at those traces of smoke, there, quite low down in the corner, on the stone."

Before the Château de Vervillers, he said:

"The looting here was frightful, I remember hearing people say—not a thing but they took, whether it looked valuable or not. And all the same, I shouldn't wonder if they left those famous bronzes. If we were to go and rummage, any odd piece of fused metal we found might be—Or no! Already at that time they were systematically collecting brass and bronze for munitions. Stole the very buttons from the uniforms of their own dead. By the way, might we go to the Ripote? Got all the rest of the day, and I fancy there's not much to be done in Verviller. Would you feel strong enough? This afternoon, perhaps; for you know there are a few people I should like to see."

"They are lunching with us," I said. "Many of us eat in common, at present; not a large population, but on very cordial terms. Our mess-room is at the old convent; the Marquis de Vervillers came there as simply as you or I, last time he passed through town. He had got his command, but feared it might be taken away from him, because of his age, as soon as any were ready for promotion."

"Probably will be," Paul observed philosophically. "This is a war for the young."

"If we take that street, our way will be much longer," I admonished, surprised at his forgetfulness. "Straight ahead, if you wish to go to the convent."

"Yes; but I would rather turn here," he said, in an altered tone.

Then I remembered that the Place de la Mairie lay a short distance ahead in the straight line.

Paul continued, almost apologetically:

"No use for me to see it again. I know how it looks."

After a few steps, however, he stopped and whirled abruptly:

"*I will go.*"

So rapid was his stride that I followed quite a distance behind. I saw him stand in the middle of the square, with face slightly paled and lips tightly pressed; he was gazing deliberately at each house in succession, and stopped at a wall seamed and scarred by machine-gun fire.

The minutes required for me to reach him sufficed for his task of self-discipline.

"Dear boy, forgive me—I wronged you," I said, taking his arm as we walked away. It was best said plainly. For I knew he read my moods.

"No, you didn't wrong me," he answered. "You just hadn't learned the difference between the old me who could only talk, and the new me who's ready to act."

Something suggested the old boyish movement of his head, though his erect form and firm muscles expressed no diffidence as he went on:

"My trip here was hard to manage, with only a two-days' leave, and the town so near the fighting line. At one moment it seemed as if I couldn't possibly be authorised to come; as if I should have to ask you to meet me in Paris, or else down at my dépôt. I was relieved, almost glad. As soon as I felt that, I knew I was still weak, and I went to work and begged so hard, that my officers smoothed out the difficulties. Now do you understand what I feel here—what I felt in our house, and in the Place de la Mairie? But I say to myself, 'Here's at least one life to be given to help punish them'."

Verviller had suffered most in the centre and towards

the river; as we approached the suburb on the other side, signs of life were noticeable. Repairs had not yet been seriously attempted; most survivors were penniless, having been in local business or retail trade, or owners of farms in the region; those who still had money needed it for more immediate ends than house-building. One or two rooms of certain homes had escaped, and elsewhere a rough covering would make a ruin habitable; the fortunate dwellers in such quarters would share them with destitute neighbours. Occasionally we would pass a gaunt old woman, classical figure of woe, seated in dingy mourning upon what had been her door-step; but oftener we saw children playing at hide-and-seek among ruins which to them were already historic. In one house, a thrifty wife profited by the missing wall to dry freshly washed clothes within doors (which is a figure of speech); and at several of the most desolate points we crossed boys with hands in their pockets and caps on the back of their heads, whistling as they went. Shop-keepers who had lost everything were in any shelter they could find, with improvised stalls, and a humble assortment of wares spread out for customers who could scarcely afford what might be most strictly necessary.

Paul plunged into one of these establishments and bought some soldier-tobacco with which he filled his pipe, and for me a terrific fifteen-centime cigar—the best to be had—which he compelled me to light on the spot, for the good woman's gratification. It made me rather ill, as cheap green cigars always do, particularly before lunch; and Paul cheered me by recalling the awful confession he had made about smoking cigarettes at Delligny's bicycle shop, and his surprise to learn I had been witness to the act.

Of all the buildings in town, the convent alone had been spared. The German commander had learned that his wounded, as well as ours, were there; they had been transferred once more when it had become evident that Verviller could not be held. He had given instructions that the hospital should not be especially burned, when orders were issued for the town generally; but he had not guaranteed immunity. The walls had somehow resisted envioning tongues of flame—or else the wind had turned—or else, as some claimed, a miracle had intervened.

Old Léonie opened the door for us, seeming nearly a hundred now, and rarely without tears in her eyes, charity in her hands, and imprecations in her mouth at the mention of Germans. Her adventures, she had never told. After endless researches and inquiries through official sources, by means of relief bureaux and with letters and telegrams mostly returned to me, I had sought her in every corner of France, only to locate her at last in the town itself. The abominations of that night, she said, had been such that nothing else could matter; and, not knowing where to find me, she had waited for me to come. Since we had organised relief-work at the convent, she spent most of her time there, helping with the children, directing the distributions of soup and meat and bread, and serving at the meals.

She had not believed my tales of Paul's rescue, because she had for so long wept over his death. At sight of him, she fell on his neck, with disconcerting results. To save the situation, he twitted her about those rusty scissors with a broken point attached to the blind of what had been her kitchen. She vowed her Alsatian gods that they were new old scissors put there to prevent a German return.

"Ach!" she cried, "if I could see that uniform on Alsatian soil—if my eyes could see that, before tears blind them!"

"Just as soon as I rejoin my regiment," quoth Paul, "I shall have the post of *vivandière* revived, and then you may come with us!"

We entered the refectory. A trim little nun, with pale, drawn face, came up:

"How are you, Paul?"

After one look, he changed colour and turned away. Regaining self-mastery, he grasped her hand:

"Very well, Mademoiselle Odette. And you?"

"*Sœur Angèle*, please," she said. "Are you very hungry? We shall soon be ready for you. I know what soldiers' appetites are. What do you think of our establishment?" Not waiting for an answer, she flitted away.

Paul glanced in her wake, tragically silent. Slowly the red came to his cheeks.

"*Sœur Angèle*." He rested his hand on the window-ledge, and leaned there, facing the street. "Yes. I saw Mademoiselle Odette die."

And as I remember, now, that many pages back I wrote of Mademoiselle Odette, "I never saw her——" I let the words stand.

Among those who gradually joined us at the long table, in the bare but scrupulously clean hall, there were few Paul had ever spoken to, though he recognised many faces. At the sound of one voice, shouting from the entrance, he started; and when a monotonous thumping step followed, I thought him about to fail once more. The peal of laughter which accompanied the thumps helped him to recover. Marcel Lavenue paused near the door of the

refectory, balanced on his left foot, the other leg being off above the knee, and cried out cheerily:

"Took only four jumps, this time! But who'll help me across the ice? If Sœur Angèle and Léonie will polish the floor——"

Paul sprang towards him:

"Marcel! My old Marcel!"

"Why, it's the little young man!" said Marcel. "Lucky you didn't run away with me, my boy, because you'd have been ignominiously sent home. This way you can soon take my place in the lines. Meanwhile you're filling Ernest's place, though not brilliantly. He helps me a lot; got two sound legs, you see, those swine left him that much, though they lopped off his right hand. We've gone into partnership, because it makes three legs and three hands between us—enough for any man and a half, which is quite right because he's barely half-sized!"

"But—can't you have a crutch?" Paul asked.

"Crutch!" echoed Marcel scornfully. "You don't fancy I want to be taken for a *cripple*?"

He reached the table, hopping easily and keeping his balance so well that he barely touched the arm held out to him.

"Aren't they going to give you a wooden leg?" Paul insisted.

"Going to? Why, they gave me one long ago, stupid!" exclaimed Marcel, with eyes no less sparkling and cheeks no less red than of yore. "You don't mean to accuse our people of neglecting their soldiers, I suppose? I'd say you were a disgrace to that uniform, if it weren't so new and clean that anybody could know it hasn't seen service. Here's what happened. Nothing's left of father's business; and Robert was killed holding the frontier—as he'd

sworn to do. Rather fine, wasn't it? You remember how he used to talk."

A plate fell, and broke; Sœur Angèle called out: "Léonie!" But it had fallen at her own feet, and she hid her face beneath the big white coif as she stooped hurriedly.

"So I said to myself," Marcel went on, "'What can you do in Verviller with your one leg?' For back here I was bound to come. The papers printed articles about the agricultural situation, and I made up my mind to be a farmer. Knew a little about it, always picked up odds and ends of information about anything. And there are a few old people left in the neighbourhood who can tell you what was done a hundred years ago when they and their grandfathers were boys together. Everybody screamed at me, of course, and said a one-legged man couldn't plough. But I said 'fiddlesticks,' and had my wooden leg fitted with a special nail on the end which lets me do what I please out of doors. Trouble is, it rips wood all to pieces, so I don't wear it at Sœur Angèle's tavern or at Père Aubret's hotel."

"You might have a boot fitted on it," Paul suggested.

"I did; but the boot fitted still better into a mud-hole, and I left all the leg with it!" Marcel laughed. "Oh, there are lots of new things I can invent when I want to; but there's no hurry because I'm learning to manage. Soon sha'n't need Ernest, or you either, you sort of a grass-soldier. Speaking of him, you ought to see that boy hold the reins and a plough-handle, with one hand and the stump of a fore-arm. Wonderful—if I do say it, who taught him! Ah! here he is. Come here, my right leg, your right hand's waiting for you."

Ernest came up, and greeted Paul very solemnly.

"Don't look apologetic about giving your left hand to

shake—I step out with my left leg!” Marcel continued, making room beside him and beginning to cut the meat in a plate Léonie brought. “He can cut almost anything, already; even managed to cut his own finger, the other day. Didn’t you? Speak up, young man! He’s out of breath, though he has two sound legs and our farm is just beyond the town. No trouble in getting land at present; and we can live at Père Aubret’s hotel, and eat here, and go to our work quite easily. Or I can. Ernest is impeded by a superfluous leg, I believe.”

The boy, wizened and sickly, began to smile; Marcel’s treatment for melancholia was evidently a success.

“My legs are all right, and—and my hand too,” he said, and fell to eating heartily.

“You can’t imagine the trouble he gave me at first,” Marcel whispered to Paul. “Depressed—Lord! Made me want to howl like a dog when the neighbour’s cat is dying out of reach of his teeth! But the lad’s improving; doesn’t give me any trouble worth the mention.”

When Paul questioned, but not before, Marcel told of his adventures.

Hidden under a seat in the train, he had reached a town near the frontier and had followed the regiment, with some of whose men he made friends in transit. Their first engagement started at a point where the Germans had been occupying French soil for several days before declaring war; while the French had been drawn back five miles so as not to fall into the German trap and be accused of attacking first, even in defence of their own invaded territory. Marcel hid in the bushes; and, soldiers being killed near him, he got a cap, a belt, a coat, a rifle and cartridges, and fought with the men. In Verviller, he had belonged to a society for military preparation, so he could shoot.

They began their advance in Alsace. Marcel described it as a "triumphal rush"; they absolutely ran down the slopes of the Vosges, the officers running at their head like schoolboys. "It was very beautiful!" Then they had to draw back, but with orders to die rather than yield up Nancy, which the Germans would take only by fighting, not by bombardment, because of the flour stored there. Thousands of men might die on either side, but the Germans were bound to get that flour, and the French to keep it. They were short of food, they had no water; they chewed the leather of their belts to moisten tongue and lips, they held pebbles in the mouth for coolness. The Lorraine troops, faithful to Joffre's order to stand at any price, saved Nancy, and stopped a German advance. Still fighting, still short of food, they were sent north. They had their reward. About the middle of October, they reached a town which had not been laid waste, and where warm food was to be had—their first warm food since the beginning of the campaign, two months and a half before.

"I'd been hit several times, or grazed, rather," said Marcel. "My knapsack shot off my back, to begin with. Full of souvenirs. We thought of such things to bring home, then, because we believed the war would be short. I had eagles from German helmets, and all sorts of stuff; a pistol, too. Gone with the knapsack! Next time I was hit, I'd been bayonetting so hard that I stopped to thrust my cap back, and cool off and rest a minute. A Boche not far away took aim and fired. Bad shot, only cut my visor clean off. I was so mad, I shouldered quick as a wink—and *that* German didn't go home on convalescent leave! Then all went right till we got north. Next time, it was the real thing. Knee smashed into bits no bigger than your nail. Fact. I lay on the field all

day; then they took me to an improvised hospital, and laid me out on a shutter in the hall, because there were no tables. Great luck they had chloroform to operate."

The meal ended, Marcel stumped merrily away. Paul followed him with his eyes, and said slowly to me:

"You always believed we would win, didn't you? Well, don't you know it now?"

Near the convent I had found a fair-sized house only partially destroyed, which I had been able to repair summarily. This was what Marcel Lavenu irreverently called "Père Aubret's hotel." He and Ernest shared a room there; the other rooms were used by any who needed them, save for a large one I had reserved as my residence and reception-hall. Rather palatial, all things considered, with a bed and three chairs and a table; yet not wanton luxury, since the business of relief work had to be transacted somewhere.

Our way to the Ripote, that afternoon, lay along a seamed and shattered road, picketed with tree-stumps. We crossed the gullies in which men had crouched to live and fight one moment longer; we passed through a grove of branch-stripped, bullet-riddled trees, as we walked carefully to avoid graves or relics of the dead—here, a coat; there, a cartridge-pouch; beyond, a rusted canteen; and, under my very feet, the hasty dressing that a soldier had pressed upon a first wound before fighting again and falling again, doubtless to stay, for there had been no quarter given and no retreat to seek. These vestiges, and those many graves, mound-like or trench-like, were all that testified to fifteen thousand men who had fallen at the defence of Verviller and of its road to Paris.

Our progress had been slow; the sun was near the setting

which we thought it best to do, and which I have
 signed in my own name and in the name of the Society.

From the time of the death of the late Mr. B.

"In the meantime, now we have a new Society
 I thought it best to do it, and I have done it, and
 which is not done. The Society is now in a state of
 confusion. I know what you mean."

PART FOUR
—
LIFE

I

"THE most inconceivable thing has happened," Paul wrote from a mysterious point in the army zone, indicated by a postal number and two groups of initials. "I've been sent up here ahead of my time, which might have been a compliment—except that I'm not in a fighting unit!

"I didn't want to worry you before, and it didn't seem worth mentioning; but I had trouble when marching with my kit. Overtrained at military preparation, before enlisting. The best results of all-round health, strength, and development, have been found among farmers and working-boys, it seems, rather than among athletes or sportsmen or the specially trained in schools like mine. As an apprentice, I should have stood a better chance. During any long march with the regulation weight on my back, my breathing goes wrong. I wouldn't believe it worth bothering about; thought I should outgrow it, you know. Quite unexpectedly, I was detached from my corps and ordered forward with one of the supply columns, as a *commis ouvrier d'administration*. No more than a plain clerk, in uniform. If I'd had any warning, I might have tried to get into the artillery, where this sort of thing wouldn't matter. But the infantry seemed best; the artillery must prepare and support the attack, yet it's the soldier who does the actual fighting; and as trench-life is the hardest and dirtiest of all, I felt that was what I must do. If I'd only known, if I'd only guessed!

"Uncle! I promise you my heart's as sound as it can possibly be. Nothing worries me save long marches with a load; and since we don't get these on the firing line, I don't see why I should be disgraced. Can't you help me? You know so many people. There's the Marquis de Vervillers. Couldn't he do something? The Count might, anyhow.

"Think of all the rifle-practice and bayonet-drill I've had; and the theory of warfare I studied, so as to pull through with the men if our officers got killed. I mustn't lose all that, must I? What rubbish I'm writing. That isn't what matters. You understand. If I can't take my place, in the mud and under fire, with the genuine men, to be as great as the least among them in his humble, useful way,—then nothing will ever seem worth while to me again; because all I've worked, and waited, and hoped, and lived for, will be reduced to nothing."

Must I confess that my heart leaped joyfully at the beginning which told me the boy was in no danger? Yet as I read on, I felt he was right. Not knowing where to find either the Marquis or the Count, I wrote to the Marquise at the auxiliary ambulance she had established in Paris; to which, by the way, she had called *Sœur Angèle*.

While I waited for her reply, I again heard from Paul. He had deceitfully made friends with an army surgeon, stating only as much of his case as might further his interests; and so had secured a magnificent certificate of health. By good luck, it was a surgeon of reputation, and wearing in the army the four stripes of a major. This I forwarded to Madame de Vervillers. A few days later came her answer. She had written, she told me, to her son, as being better placed to help the boy than the Marquis, and had said, "Your father would certainly feel as I do,

that we should render young Clermont any service in our power." Bless the Marquise! I had thought her cold and rather haughty, under the perfect politeness of the grande dame. Perhaps I had misjudged her; or else the war had transformed her, like countless others throughout France.

Having done what he could, and biding developments as he must, Paul found time to give me an idea of his new, though—as he hoped—temporary existence. He wrote:

"To think I used to believe I should never live in a château! Well, here we are, a whole bunch of us, inhabiting a fine château with an extensive park surrounding it. Only, as our boots are armed with nails and covered with mud, we might damage the carpets and furniture if allowed within those stately walls. So, if you would know the homely truth, we occupy the former stables of Count I-Don't-Know-Who.

"But we are comfortable. Shamefully comfortable, for soldiers in war-time. Fancy, we boast such luxuries as pots to cook in and plates to eat from! And we have a foot-tub for purposes of washing! And a canvas bucket (with a hole in one side) which reaches here quite one-third full, after a trip to the well! We even have a candelabrum; hangs from a nail in the wall, and if I hadn't a sense of the fitness of things pertaining to a château, I might vulgarly call it a lantern. We're ever so warm and comfortable; old chairs and broken shutters to burn! As for our beds, I must say they are not so soft as the ground I slept on a little while ago, but they boast straw mattresses in which only straw is lacking.

"So much for comforts shared in common. At the present moment, I am monopolising a fine table, made of boards stretched on a saddler's tressel, and the use of a

pen-holder which I manufactured out of the top of a sardine-tin.

"Regarding my health, splendid, never better. Lots and lots of fresh air; at night, because our château is full of holes; by day, as we rattle about the country on a motor-lorry. Excuse me, I should have said automobile. I sometimes forget to live up to the dignity of my new residence.

"Until now, our column has been used only to supply regiments quartered near here for a day or two. They say, however, that we may soon be trusted as far as a trench. I don't dare believe in such good luck. The next best thing to being able to shoot is to know you are running the same risks as others by being shot at. If it could be true!

"You will let me know the very minute you hear from the Marquis or the Count? Even though the news is bad, because then I must go to work and find some other scheme. Have you tried writing to your friends in Paris? Perhaps——" etc., etc., etc.

"At last, I've been officially under fire!" he wrote a week later. "Officially, I mean, as part of my duty, instead of just happening to be there.

"I was sent with my comrades Nadier and Pazel, to reach a regiment in a fairly safe place. But to get to it we had to cross a part of the road where the Germans always keep guns trained, firing every few minutes for luck, whether they sight anything or not. You get them or you don't—I should say they get us or don't.

"Ran full speed, I can assure you; a giddy rate of four or five miles an hour, at the very least. But we'd no sooner reached it than—Zing! Boom! Weren't we excited, though! The shells made such an unholy row that we

were almost deafened, for a while. As for Nadier, he went quite deaf. But then, he had an extraordinary adventure.

"The first shell that came, before we could crouch down, burst about twenty feet away. The pieces flew over our heads, by good luck; or most of them did. The shell itself, however, ripped up a bit of hard dirt, as it struck, and sent this new sort of projectile flying. Hit Nadier on the side of the head, and knocked him over, flat. He knew he was stretched out by some hideous force, and knew he must be killed. Didn't we laugh, Pazel and I! It was ever so long before we could get our breath to call him back to life. And then he couldn't hear. We shall never allow him to forget his death and funeral. Because we got up a funeral for him. Made him lie down, insisting that the lorry was a hearse, and he had to behave like a self-respecting corpse. To tell the truth, he was glad enough to be quiet, poor chap, for he had a bad headache—which he would have been spared if he'd been killed, he said mournfully. Pazel and I think he's indecently proud of the 'wound' he got, a lump on the side of his head. He tries to brag, but when we're about, we take the arrogance out of him by observing it's on the wrong side, i.e., where he toppled over and did his best to knock the floor out of the lorry.

"People talk about the behaviour of our troops," he went on, "and too much couldn't be said in their praise. But what may not be realised is the splendid spirit found among peasants and villagers behind the lines. Simply wonderful! Talking of 'calm' seems inappropriate, when cannon are booming all the time and shells bursting everywhere; certainly nothing in the circumstances suggests peace of mind. Yet the impression one gets is of calm. Or else a clear, cool sense of duty. I don't know

how to explain it; but it's there; and it isn't either indifference or ignorance. Men and women actually within the army lines, surrounded by ravages, and threatened every minute, just go on quietly with their work, making the day fruitful.

"Yesterday, at one of the most dangerous points we pass, a point where even foot soldiers are made to go spaced out in groups of two or three, I saw an elderly peasant ploughing. I slowed down to ask if things were then so quiet. He answered Yes; some shells had fallen in the next field an hour before, but none where he was. (While he spoke, the cannon spoke too.) I asked if he could keep at it every day. 'No; some days they stop me,'—and calling to his horse, he went on."

Writing to me thus, Paul little suspected that Verviller, again threatened, was piecing out its existence under rather similar conditions. Work in shops and fields continued, without hesitation or murmur, and with that limitless, sublime patience which has been one of the most unexpected yet most complete developments in France under the influences of a protracted as well as cruel war. The details of its expression were such that they might pass unnoticed, unless one looked closely. Often one could not detect distress, from the appearance or the conversation of those most affected.

One evening, for instance, I was invited to dine with an officer and his wife at their hotel in Paris; was very pleasantly entertained; and learned only accidentally, in reply to a question as I left, that news had reached them, shortly before my arrival, of the total loss of their home in Soissons. On another occasion, a man I had known for years began telling me of his brother-in-law, whose factory was closed and the machinery rusting,

whose wife and children were dependent on the charity of various members of the family, and who had no hope of avoiding insolvency at the end of the war: yet they were all perfectly cheerful, and spoke or wrote of nothing save affairs of general interest. While my friend talked, I bethought me of his personal problems, and asked after his affairs. "Mine? They no longer exist," he replied simply; and reverted to the theme of his admirable brother-in-law.

I related these and similar instances to Paul.

"Good!" he answered. "That's the sort of spirit we want."

At about this time, I received a note from the Count, now Captain de Vervillers, who had spoken to his Colonel about Paul. Transfers from one service to another were being avoided, at that juncture, for fear of causing confusion; but soon all men fit for field service, including many from the auxiliary, would have a turn at the front. The Captain hoped we should not have to await this development, but could not say more at present; and advised Paul to be patient, doing his best where he was, and deserving the esteem of his officers. Decidedly vague; yet such as it was, I forwarded the letter to Paul who found much comfort in it.

Gradually, his work had extended; sometimes he would go off on long expeditions with those supplies of his, whatever they were—for he was held to discretion in certain respects, and though I often had news, I rarely could guess whence it came. He surprised me, then, with a long, detailed letter, prompted, I suppose, by his thrilling adventure and the profound indignation he felt. No names were mentioned, yet the scene was not difficult to identify.

"The three of us had been sent to D——," he wrote, "with a special lot of stuff, and got there so late we were told to wait until morning for our return orders. Unusual; for the place, often under fire, had been practically evacuated. But a good many civilians have wanted to stay. They tell you: 'After the war, there will be two classes of people here, those who remained and those who went away. We prefer to be among the first.' And indeed they are, among the first anywhere. Why, when shells burst near them, in this town which isn't a military centre and has no strategic value and is being bombarded only so as to terrorise the population,—when shells burst near them, or blow up the house next to theirs, they only—— But I'd better tell the story properly.

"Nadier and Pazel and I were put with our lorry in a sort of shed. Had been a clearing hospital, I think; big place, with a bomb-proof vault under it. I was acting as corporal, and in the morning was about to start for our orders, when two loud explosions rang out. The first thought I had was that the famous fifteen-inch naval gun had been trained on the town once more. Yet the rare people I saw in the street didn't pay much attention to the noise, and I told myself they knew more about such tea-parties than I did.

"Meanwhile, cannon were booming every fifteen seconds or so; I counted forty reports, but still nobody except me seemed to be noticing, so I concluded it must be target-practice. The reports sounded on; I counted ninety or a hundred. Then a violent explosion came, not like the others, but loud and sinister. The whole street shook. Over the house-tops ahead of me, I saw a huge blackish cloud shoot up, funnel-shaped, and hang clammily in relief against the sky; its edges grew ragged

and frittered away slowly, until it had all shivered off into the air.

"If I hadn't known then that it was a big naval shell, there was plenty of outer evidence. People began running in all directions; no element of panic, only running to gain time. Whistles and sirens blew like twenty circus steam pianos gone mad all at once. On the top of the Belfry, a flag with thirteen blue and white stripes was hoisted. That meant a bombardment. The people I had seen running were bound for their cellars.

"I'll take my chances out in the streets, if it's a case of big shells in an old-fashioned town; real military defences are different from improvised places with buildings over them waiting to collapse. The annoying thing about these particular shells, fired from such a distance, is that they follow a trajectory with a high curve, so the whistling can't be heard; there's no warning and they are timed to cut through several storeys before exploding. I passed some houses that had been hit. Never saw neater work. Brick, cement, timbers ripped apart, from ground to roof; and the pieces, including samples of houses on each side, scattered about as a child might toss a handful of toys over the nursery floor.

"There were several other big explosions; the calls of horns and sirens grew shriller; nobody was left in the streets but a few officers and soldiers bound on errands.

"When I got to the barracks, the men said that aviators always preceded the bombardments; one had come this morning, to give the range, and sent down quite a number of bombs, then escaped while the big gun got to work.

"My orders were to clear out. As I returned to Nadier and Pazel, the explosions started once more—bombs from another aviatik. What our planes were doing, I

can't imagine; gone too far afield chasing the first Germans, I suppose. Anyhow, our land-batteries bombarded the thing zealously. The aviatik seemed to be right over my head, though it wasn't; and as the shells fired at it would burst, they spread out in little painty white clouds, consistent and clean-cut like those in old pictures with a Saint walking on them. They hung up there in bunches for ever so long, drifting with the wind and sinking slowly. The aviatik, quite the contrary, rose very high, beyond range, and vanished just as successfully.

"Some people had taken refuge in our bomb-proof. I groped my way in, from curiosity. Men and women sat quietly on chairs; no impatience, no anxiety—only waiting. One lady had brought her silver toilet articles with her, I don't know whether to use or to save them; others cherished small trifles. A lantern swung from a beam, shedding a dim light on the strange, pathetic group. They asked me if it was over, and I told them I didn't know; the aviatik had come again. The general verdict was that it might be well to stay down there a while longer; they had already waited an hour or more, patient and resigned. I heard not a word of complaint or impatience.

"An English Red Cross lady told me that in the railway sheds some nurses and wounded soldiers had been struck.

"Nothing more seemed to happen. The aviatik was now after smaller game, preferable for purposes of terrorising. We three soon knew, because our way lay through the tiny town of B——, five miles to the south, on which the big shells were presently to fall. Undefended, ungarrisoned, as harmless as a town can be, the spectacle was appalling.

"In one of the first streets, a house reduced half to

dust lay on our right. A citizen came up with a dry laugh: 'Don't waste your time over that. It's nothing. See the Place Gambetta.'

"We went there. A corner house had positively been blown over much of the square, and some pieces had reached neighbouring streets. Only the walls of the inner angle were standing, and these badly damaged; of the houses on either side, one had lost its roof, the other its upper storey, and both were out of plumb as if about to collapse. Buildings in the same block were shattered, and shutters and glasses smashed as far as the other end of the square. The people who lived in the wrecked house had gone out, all three of them, barely twenty minutes before the shell came.

"The work of other shells had been as bad, or worse. One had been aimed at the military infirmary, but fell next door. I looked for vestiges to show that this mass of nameless trash had been a house. Not a wall, not a floor, not a stick of furniture could be identified; only the chimney rose, a solid column above the trash-heap, and a black crucifix still hung there, over the mantel of what had been the second storey—the only thing spared—a big Jansenist crucifix, with convulsed features and writhing limbs. Horrible! One woman had been killed and a man and a woman injured; and two were buried in the cellar, beyond rescue.

"Citizens stood about, quite calm, answering questions or volunteering monosyllabic information. No signs of panic; they were not afraid, even; only very sad. They said twelve were known to be killed, seven wounded. A few townspeople were already on their way to Paris, but most had decided to stick it out here; some were bound for a village, believed to lie beyond range, for a few days.

"As we were leaving, we saw a crowd gathered round a young woman who wore a hat with two red plumes waving half a yard above her head. A gendarme was questioning her. She claimed to have come from Paris forty-eight hours ago to visit a sister about whom she appeared imperfectly informed; her papers, when examined, proved irregular. From this discovery to the belief she might be a spy responsible for the destruction of the town, there was but a step. Yet as the gendarme led her off to make further inquiries, no threats were uttered. A grizzled convalescent soldier called out, and the crowd approved: 'Take off those red plumes! This is no place for Paris fashions—our town is in mourning.'

"Along the road, we met many families on their temporary exodus from the stricken, heroic little place. Most were mothers with young children; some carried babies in their arms, pushing in front of them the carriages with a few small necessities. No tears nor despair visible. But sadness and patience—such patience!

"I can't stand much more of this sort of thing, really. I'm capable of running away to join a fighting regiment, though I risk being shot as a deserter. Do you know why I was 'acting' corporal in that expedition of ours? I refused the stripe when offered to me, because I feared it might bind me to my present work."

II

WHEN I next heard from him, his address was "Corporal P. Clermont." Perhaps he had had early intimation that Captain de Vervillers was to prove even better than the word which had brought faint encouragement. Heavy losses presently caused the —th Infantry to return

to its base and re-form. Acting on instructions from his protector, and presumably seconded in high places, Paul obtained a short leave, proceeded to the base, was introduced to the Colonel; and the transfer became an accomplished fact.

Knowledge that the boy was happy comforted me as time wore on with scant news from him. Often for a week or more all I received would be a printed post-card, from which the inappropriate formulas had been deleted, and to which his signature and code address were added. So I learned repeatedly of his being "well," and having "received your letters," and promising to "write soon"; while firm strokes of blue pencil denied such painful facts as being wounded or in hospital. Then it would be a written card, or perhaps a letter, but so hedged in by discretion that, avoiding to speak of events or operations, he could give me little idea of his experiences. I reproached him with this, stating that I knew soldiers in trenches no less active than his, doubtless, who managed to send much information to their family and friends. To which he replied: "I don't know their orders (*consigne*) but I know ours."

Brief and restrained though they were, these phrases told their tale, when brought together; and if his former attitude had filled me with confidence, the new reinforced me with triple steel. The fine theory and generalisation of his civilian and motor-lorry days had vanished. Remote contingencies, or the opinion of people not doing the active work, had ceased to count. One single idea dominated. He and comrades whom he esteemed, commanded by officers they loved, had before them a hard task and a long one; but they were there to see it through, and so the less said about it the better.

One day, after much time had passed, a small packet came for me. A letter from the Count de Vervillers accompanied it:

DEAR MR. AUBRET,

I surprised our friend diligently scribbling in a journal he has, it seems, kept for your benefit, since lengthy letters cannot be sent always. We don't approve of the principle of diaries. Accordingly I confiscated this book and the appended pages. But I found nothing of a nature to compromise anybody, though much will be of particular interest to you. Wherefore I forward it with the assent of the author, whose new responsibilities give him so much work that he says he would have been unable to do more than finish the sentence interrupted when I surprised him at this literary task.

The book is about twice the size it should be, for purposes of entering a pocket conveniently; so its fate has been to get folded down the middle and all but broken in two. Material evidence shows that it formerly belonged to a German. As frontispiece appears a wood-engraving of Emperor William II, looking perhaps twenty-five years old, handsome as a whiskered Adonis, undaunted as a pagan god, and inspired as a first-day saint. After comes a map of this monarch's domains; then follow three or four pages roughly scribbled in German, notes about the regions crossed by the invaders. The author lacked both observation and imagination; the outline for a love-letter, interleaved, must have been cribbed from a popular novel. The remaining pages were filled by Paul; and, not having sufficed, are swollen out with ordinary letter-paper at the end.

This spoil of war, as I discovered later, had been a friendly offering from the most reprehensible character in his squad; an ex-butcher of La Villette and an Apache

"chief." The name—Berral—occurs frequently throughout the narrative.

From their initial contact, Berral had been aggressive. Older than the man newly placed in authority over him, and more experienced in trench-fighting, he derided the idea that any benefit could result from studying the theory of war; the education obtained in such districts as Belleville, Charonne, La Villette might be useful, but not that found elsewhere in Paris. Respectful towards officers, though his entire existence had previously consisted of anarchistic insubordination, the ex-butcher resented interference from non-coms, and more especially from a simple *gradé*. Paul could probably have been trusted for tactfulness in delicate situations; and good-humour is a quality which has rarely failed him; but firmness, which is the third main characteristic demanded of a corporal, the firmness which never blinks a serious fault nor represses a slight one, unvarying in quality yet infinitely adaptable, could come only with the tests which help to make it. Berral supplied many such tests, I gather; and I supposed, when reading the diary, that Paul had some modest feeling as of a debt towards this man who had made the school a hard, hence effective one.

But there was more, which I shall put down here in its proper place though I heard it from Paul's lips many months after reading the diary. Small wonder our corporal abstained from compromising his sympathetic ruffian by noting the episode.

The weather was sultry; no clean water had been available for very long; the wine had gone sour beyond possibility of drinking; black coffee, served as sole beverage, had reduced the men to a state which varied from extreme irritability to a heaviness approaching somnolence.

In the course of an intolerably hot and lifeless afternoon, a fresh supply of wine came. But there was not happiness in its train: for, in the hopeless days, Berral had won, at cards, the next-portion-to-come of many comrades.

That night, just before a round by Captain de Vervillers, Paul crept out in time to save Berral's life, rousing him from drunken slumbers on sentry-duty; the man's fear was so great that he sobered almost instantly, and Paul knew him well enough to believe there would be no further offence. The Captain suspected something; in fact, a little later he addressed to Paul a cryptic phrase which was a discreet endorsement for unlawful initiatives in exceptional cases.

As far as I know, Paul and Berral never discussed the affair afterwards; but thenceforth the Apache-butcher became the young corporal's slave, and the gift of this diary was a part of the tribute. Paul writes:

He got it early in the war, when the dragoons were sent towards the frontier. They met a lot of German boys, volunteers who didn't know how to do anything but ride and shoot, without training or discipline, just put on horseback and sent to skirmish ahead of the army and burn and pillage and terrorise—and kill if they could, or get killed, clearing the road for real soldiers. Berral galloped down the sergeant of such a detachment, and stuck him in the back with his spear—"Before he could turn on me, you know!" I never would have thought of keeping a diary if Berral hadn't taken this one; and kept it as a treasure until he gave it to me. Good old Berral!

For Captain de Vervillers, Berral devised a different form of tribute. There was, within full view of their trenches, a farm which had been alternately held by French and by Germans, according to the variable fortunes of war; and the Germans occupied it now, but dared frequent it only at night. Wherefore Berral, in broad

daylight, seized upon an hour's leisure to brave the "Boches," walked over as the readiest of targets, plucked a handful of flowers, and brought them back to the Captain.

"Close shave," Paul's diary begins. The two words stand alone, at the top of a page.

Bullet struck my cartridge-pouch, full force, and knocked me down. Scattered the cartridges all over the ground. Why they didn't go off, I can't imagine. Anyway, they stopped the bullet and saved me. Nobody could guess my first notion when I recovered my senses: to find those cartridges and know why they hadn't gone off! Got only three; not the right ones, because they hadn't a scratch. The rest must have jumped a long way. But more shots were raining all round me, and I got under cover, not being a fool.

The next entry bears the melancholy head-line: "No shots."

That's the best I can do as a date, already we can't count the days; if we're not to be able to count events either, then what shall we do for calendars? To-day has been quiet like a week-day along the Mareille. If this sort of thing keeps up, I shall regret the food-supply column.

Yet I know I need only put my head out through those bushes stuck artificially between the trees on our hill-top, five yards from me, and I shouldn't have any head left. One thing I've learned is that the art of fighting doesn't necessarily consist in getting killed. Captain de Vervillers tells us at every opportunity: "Courage is an admirable quality, but no soldier ought to die before accounting for at least four of the enemy." The first time he said that, all looked foolish. Since I've been here, I don't believe any of us has accounted for anything save provisions.

For some days after, the entries are short and desultory. The men have been "improving" their quarters. One

note head-lined "Grand Hotel" announces the completion of that establishment. Another labelled "Casino" deals rather vaguely with questions of internal decoration. A third entitled "Day Walk" says that so many shots have been fired at soldiers in the path ordinarily used, near the crest of their hill and leading from the bastions on the very edge to the rest-camp in the woods of the far slope, that a new "avenue," nicely screened, has been made; and the other, shorter and more convenient, will become the "Night Walk." Placards have been posted at "corners" of these thoroughfares; "so that," Paul continues, "we might think ourselves in Paris, on the Boulevard—especially at night."

The next entry, long, flowing, indignant, is a surprise:

NEWS.

A bunch of papers came this morning. We are all thoroughly disgusted. Every one of these Parisian sheets talks about the "comforts" of our trenches, and the merry lives we lead . . .

Hang it all, we may try to make the best of it; we may forget, sometimes, much that we are forced to tolerate; but to represent us as enjoying a sort of picnic, better off than if we were at home, or else better off than mobilised workmen who draw their ten or fifteen francs a day, as in peace times, while other workmen, and masters and capitalists too, wearing the same uniform, subject to the same laws, are drawing their few *sous* a day and losing their health and seeing their business go to ruin into the bargain. . . .

I say, next thing will be to propose a vote of thanks to the Germans, and express our appreciation of this pleasant opportunity they give us for leading the simple life. It is true that those who don't die of pneumonia or bronchitis, or get crippled with rheumatism or infected with tuberculosis, do become hardened so that nothing but steel or lead can scratch through their hides.

This sort of newspaper talk is our own fault, I suppose. We certainly can't be expected to adopt a depressed tone when

writing home. There's nothing to be depressed about. But that isn't saying we lie on beds of roses and drink—what is the stuff heathen gods used to drink? Since it's got to be done—not the drinking, but the work—we don't grumble. It even gets to seem right and natural. But from that to telling civilians we're enjoying ourselves more than at home. . . .

On the last page, I alluded in rather fine language to our new quarters. Perhaps I, too, have contributed to keep that legend going, without wanting to. For the sake of historic accuracy, I might as well specify that our own underground city is really comfortable—when dry; and that rough platforms of interwoven twigs laid out on the earth don't begin to float until water has trickled in for quite a while. The "Grand Hotel" is furnished with a depth of four inches of straw on the floor, truly a luxury; and it has a window a foot square which lets in appreciable light. As for the "Casino" and its decorations, these consist of newspaper jokes and sketches stuck over a shelf built into the logs of the inner wall. Luxuries being of a relative nature, it's as well to define them before getting excited.

Old André has fallen into another of his melancholy moods. I believe the articles are responsible. He came and sat down by me as I wrote, and began to chatter in his usual way about anything he sees or the first notion that enters his head. Of course I let him run on. A man near the forties, discharged for ill-health when trying to do his military service fifteen years ago, who enlisted at once when the war began, without waiting to be called up and examined—of course we admire and humour him. He's done a lot of fighting already, and been wounded.

"I hope I get shot soon again," says he.

"Easy enough," say I. "Just look out through those bushes—"

"I don't want to die; I've got a wife and children," he went on. "A bullet in the arm or leg, you know; doesn't hurt much, and really doesn't matter. Better than fighting day after day up to your knees in the water of trenches. You notice the sky seems clouding over? You may recover from a bullet, but once you begin with 'pains' they stay for life. I'd give a hundred *sous* to a Boche to put another bullet in me, quick."

He laughed. So did I. He grew very solemn and watched me for some moments before saying:

"You may laugh, but I don't think it's funny."

"I laughed because you did," I answered.

"Oh, I suppose we all try to make the best of it," he said, seeming to remember. "But the only fun we had was long before you came. It has stopped, now. It was in the days when we dug ditches for trenches anywhere, and neither army knew what it was walking into. There would be no firing, and we would see the enemy coming along, quite innocent; and each of us would pick his man. We said to one another, I'll take that little one over there! You settle the big one on the left! Which one will you drop? And so on. Then we'd get the order to fire. Very funny, to see a man tumble over when you have picked him out while he walked quietly along, jesting and not suspecting anything! We cheered each other when our aim was good and we'd kept our word. But when the answering volley came, and our men died, it wasn't funny any more. No, the only real fun is in picking your Boche and killing him at the first discharge."

Andrézy looked quite mad, as he spoke. Strange, but the face of every man changes when he speaks of those he's killed. It's what we are here for; yet none of us seems capable of it until we get started on a charge, or else are attacked; then we go mad, and get mad when we recall it. Or perhaps it's another sort of nature that was already in us, deep down, and comes to the surface.

I didn't know what to answer. Which didn't matter, because Andrézy became himself again, but more and more melancholy. Such a brave and simple soldier; so willing in small things, and never complaining of what he has to do. Since he gets satisfaction from occasional Hamletising, I don't stop him.

"We're being killed off at such a rate," he continued, "that if the war lasts another six months I don't believe a single one of us now fighting will still be alive." After a silence he concluded: "When a black is in danger, or dying, he cries: '*Marabout! Marabout!*' Means fate, I suppose, or God. That makes him happy. I don't know what I shall say when my turn comes. But I know I haven't ever seen Marabout, and I have seen life and it's good!"

I am happy to add that when Andrésey appears once again, on the very next page, it is in a group of radiant soldiers, including the Apache Berral, who have rescued three kittens under a bush and have decided to adopt them as children of the regiment. Andrésey has taken off his coat to make a bed for them, and Berral looks annoyed, for a moment, that he did not think of this first; but all join in gleeful exclamations when one kitten discovers that a sleeve is a tunnel in which games of choo-choo cars can be organised, whereupon this infant prodigy is baptised a "poilu."

Now Paul finds a classical quotation for his date, taking it from that tragedy of Shakespeare's which I have pointed out to him as the neglected contrast which serves to illuminate Hamlet. What, indeed, could be more evident than the relation between a king who meditates more than is good for him after each event, and the prince who meditates too much before?

"Let's talk of graves, of worms, and epitaphs."

Andrésey started it. Said he never was afraid except once; the first time he was under fire, but not when it started. They were in the trenches, both sides going pretty hot, all aiming and shooting regularly.

"The man next to me was a good friend of mine," Andrésey went on. "I said something and he was answering; my eyes were on him. A bullet struck him over the nose, between the eyes, and came out at the back of his head. Killed him clean, in less than a second, while he was speaking and I watching him. I couldn't fire for another ten minutes. Too badly frightened to move. I lay where I'd been, and he lay where he'd been; only I was alive and he was dead. In those ten minutes I got used to the idea. So I caught up my gun and went to work. It's seemed quite natural, since."

"You took it better than I did," Berral observed. "I was lying in the trenches; our company was being slowly driven

back all along the line. A lot of men had been killed, and the others were withdrawing singly or in groups. One comrade and I were the last to stay, just to take a few more shots. I fired, and my friend didn't follow it up. 'He thinks it's time we went too,' I said to myself; so I said aloud, 'Well, old man, are we going?' I put out my hand as I spoke, and touched him. He'd been killed only a moment before—bullet in the heart. I was alone in that trench with the dead. And I can tell you I jumped up and RAN! Didn't care about the bullets I drew on myself. All I cared was to get out of that place, dead or alive!"

Constant had been listening in that dreamy way of his, but hadn't made a remark. Looked as if he wanted to, but didn't know how to begin. His face was shaved and unshaved, of course. The ends of his long moustache never can find a rest-place on the stubble.

"What about you?" Berral asked.

"When I was wounded," said Constant, "I'd been sent through a wood with a despatch calling for reinforcements. I hadn't gone very far when I pitched forward. Didn't know I was down till the visor of my cap struck the ground. Then——"

"Yes," Berral interrupted, "but we're talking about fear. How was it when you first felt afraid?"

Constant's lank face was quite expressionless.

"The first time I was on a battle-field I didn't like it," he admitted presently. "The second time, I minded less. The third time, I don't believe I minded at all."

That was all we could get out of him. I may be wrong, but he struck me as one of those who haven't yet roused to what fear means. Brave men aren't afraid of being afraid, and cowards are afraid of acknowledging it; between the two come heavy-minded people who fail to realise, but who wake up sooner or later and get a shock.

The diary abruptly changes tone; the descriptive character towards which it was tending falls away, and the proportion of sentiment dwindles. A shift of scene has something to do with this; increased tenseness of

life, and gradual custom of hardship, add their share. From the hill-top they guarded, these men have been brought down into the series of trenches which carry on the defences from the rolling ground at its foot, over a gentle rise, to the valley of a small river. Behind the third trench is a forest where heavy guns gape ready to support advances and to defy attacks; and again beyond these, blockhouses have been built wherever roads cross. But the men consider themselves an invincible host and scorn such precautions. Of these details, the last alone is mentioned in writing by Paul.

Not only have his entries become short, but the language undergoes a change. The English which was fluent at the start becomes erratic; yet he persists in it, observing that this will "help to entertain his hand—" which would be good French. Where a word escapes him, or perhaps I should say where he is conscious of not finding it, he slips in a French one, sometimes suggesting several English equivalents. His soldier-vocabulary sits easily on him; beef becomes *singe*, bread *boule*, wine *pinard*; a man is no longer mad but *patraque*, and suffers not from homesickness but from *cafard*; he airily alludes to having been *saucé* by the enemy's guns, and is modest enough to mention fellow-corporals as *cabots*.

No complaint about lack of events now; and slight allusion to them, because they occur too frequently. The first-line trench was very near the Germans, in that smiling valley. On days when all remained quiet, the strain proved terrible; at night sentinels, when relieved, would collapse after the nervous tension of fancying an enemy's hands ever closing upon their throats. One man—Chapard, of the bright black eyes, who got excited so easily and never would take anything seriously—rose

up, from bravado, as he fired; the bullets which whistled about him did no harm.

"I'll do that again, three times!" he cried out. Paul writes.

We hadn't time to stop him. They seemed to be playing with him, for he was able to do it twice, while I tried to get to him. He rose again just as I caught him, and fell back on me, dead. I couldn't help telling the others it served him right for being a fool.

A week later, Paul returns to the diary, which he had neglected:

Something prompted me to ask for news of the Marquis, tonight. We are in rest-camp; things have been severe, of late, our trenches to rebuild in part each day because of the fire, and no water reaching us; but of course drill began once more as soon as we got here, so the men should remain orderly.

The Captain started at my question, and asked: "What made you come at this moment?" I told him it was impulse. Only then, I noticed he held a letter. "Five minutes ago, I learned of my father's death—a soldier's death," he said. I understood. We have heard about the old reserve officers, many retired because of their age, but more for incompetence, and the public confuses the two. I am sure the Marquis exposed himself to death rather than risk a seeming disgrace.

Some days later, a brief note:

It's true. The Marquis drew a sword he had got especially, and charged at the head of his men. He died in time—the order for his retirement was on the way. That's what I call a soldier.

The pages that follow are filled with careless, fragmentary lines, so summarily condensed as to be often incoherent. Yet through them thrills a spirit that tells, as it were without words, the story of patient waiting,

of stolid endurance, of valiant self-abnegation, of desperate initiative at rare times and of resolute good-will at others when the strain is heaviest; that story of sound, simple faith and of the courage sublime because humble, which have made the war glorious despite its horrors by ennobling those who, having sacrificed most heavily, have proved worthiest of their trust.

Here we are, returned. I thought we'd stay there. Berral, Andréy, and Constant are still ours—the last shaved and unshaved, as by habit. But his tall, loose, bony form did such good *besogne* (business? execution?) that I shall not call him a hesitant character any more.

It was—five, six days ago? I do not know. We attacked, to retake the *patelin* of —. (Village or hamlet. Bunch of houses. For what remained of it, we could have left it, and the Boches too. But we wanted it.)

Our company was not on that side. We must attack by the plain. We started like fine devils. I don't know how I and thirty men we were found separated from the others. I alone as non-com! A true *pagaille*. (What's *mélémélo* in English? I forget. Something like mix-up.) It must be said that we had fought very much, and then, you understand. . . . (That is a good formula, when one does not oneself understand at all.)

The Boches have pushed forward, their new V-trench is between us and ours, we are cut off. But they must think we menace from this side, they must believe us a battalion at least. I spread out my men. If I know not how to do the officer, I commence all the same to be something of a *juteur*. (What's the rank of *adjutant* in English? I think I have never known.)

I order a fire of the devil to begin when ours, over there, open fire. We have many cartridges, and in all cases we can only fight to the end. Here we are, it commences. My "battalion" maintains the honour of the army of General —.

Night fell. There we were, surrounded. Or not quite. The Boches had evacuated a small piece of isolated trench, where

they were hard-pushed by ours. God knows how we shoved into it and got in the earth. Soon came the black night. Nothing more we could do, so we all rested on our positions. We thirty took turns sleeping, and we kept very quiet, I can promise you, not being sure whether we were at home or across the way.

Suddenly Constant whispers to me, "They're attacking!" I look, and say, "Yes, they are."

With my glasses, I saw an army advancing, but from the far plain. The points of their helmets were clear in the night. At their head, a tall superior officer, though I could not count the stripes to know if he was colonel or major. He accompanied a stout general officer, whose stars shone at moments.

My men wished to fire. I thought better to draw the enemy on a little. We were bound to die; but our men, warned by us, could do better execution at close quarters.

The advance continued. What was the most impressive thing was the absolute silence. Movements of officers and men could be observed, but no sound was heard. Our men always make a little noise; there's the click of metal or the cry of trap-pings to give us away.

"An example of what perfect discipline means," I whispered to the nearest to me.

Yet the advance did not progress. I concluded I must see more. Very cautiously, I raised myself.

What we had seen was the waving heads of plants; the tall colonel was a slim tree afar; the general was a bush with a star behind it, half-hidden by leaves. And all of us had seen alike; and I had had great trouble to hold my men's fire.

The Captain says I spared our army an alarm which might have precipitated an engagement and compromised our chances.

But with all that, nothing to eat. Luckily, Berral, always *sureteur* by nature, manages to *dégoter* some Boche stores, hams, etc. Confitures, too. All hidden in the earth, where he found them. (If you didn't know what it is to *dégoter*, you know now.)

Three days of this life. The last, nothing to eat or drink. I have to calm my men; they enervate themselves, and wish to charge. But I say to them, "It is not that I attach to your skins or mine a value they have not. But don't you see, im-

beciles that you are, that you should betray all the secret of the comedy? We are believed to be hundreds." Already, we had two lost.

In the morning it was we took the offensive. Our real troops, I mean. The *patelin* of ——— was definitely taken. The Germans, driven back, came towards us. Now was our time. I told the men we must try to cut a path through. Most of us would stay there, but those who fell would help save the rest. They all shook hands with me to say good-bye, and I ordered the charge. It was awful. We got through on this side only thirteen. I am promoted Sergeant; Berral and Andrésy, and four others pass corporals; the six that remain, including Constant, from simple soldiers, become first-class.

But it makes a droll effect on me, to know the Boches installed in our ———

Here breaks off the story. Had Paul not been interrupted, fate was even then preparing for the whole diary an end so complete that it would never have been read by any who had a right to it.

III

A YOUNG Frenchman, having many unusual points in his appearance, attracted much attention when he entered a train bound for Paris, after a short stop at a junction connecting with the north. Clad half in uniform and otherwise suggesting a tourist, he was very young, but the gold stripe proclaiming him a sergeant glittered on a cap of the new model; from chin to puttees, which were of the regulation sort, an ordinary macintosh enveloped him, though the weather was fine. His face, pale and wasted, had an almost furtive expression about its sunken eyes. Unencumbered by luggage, having not so much as a small bag, he jumped into a second-class compartment, and immediately took out some cigarettes, asking two ladies if he might smoke.

"Have one? They're Dutch," he said to a man in the corner next to him.

The man suspiciously exchanged glances with his vis-à-vis: both were middle-aged, and of the very middle-class.

"So you went to Holland to get these?" asked the man, surveying the Sergeant.

"Yes! Just got back. Taken prisoner and escaped. Was a fugitive for months. Slow work, you understand; any mistake meant death. Passed through Holland to England. Reached France last night. Tried to get information about my corps, and missed the train."

Meanwhile, the man had decided he could afford a smoke in such company. He took one of the proffered cigarettes; so did his vis-à-vis.

The Sergeant went on:

"I'm wearing any clothes I could get. Managed to secure a cap with the right sort of stripe, and some puttees; then this to hide the rest." He opened the macintosh, and displayed a civilian coat and shirt. "Anything, rather than be without a uniform. Don't want to be mistaken for some sort of an ambushed brother. Rather be thought a spy! That happened to me once, because I had no papers. But I've got papers now—a Belgian passport." He took it out, unfolded it, read it to himself, and put it back in his pocket-book.

By this time his manner, far more than his words, had won the sympathy and the confidence of those seated near him. There were the two men already mentioned; a little lady who had produced her knitting and murmured occasional encouragement; an English-looking civilian who listened attentively. Another lady, however, in the far corner, and a tall gentleman evidently her husband—both were in stiff, intense mourning, and so uncongenial

that only ties of matrimony could have held them within a yard of each other—showed unity of views in their extreme disapproval of the entire performance.

“You say you escaped from the Germans?” the little lady prompted.

“Jumped from the train,” the Sergeant began again, eagerly. “I’d been put with others in a cattle-car. The officer responsible for us had closed the doors, of course. But as soon as he left, the soldiers on guard began to drink. You rarely find a German soldier without his beer, but you never find him without his schnapps. So they fell to drinking schnapps. It was very hot, and the heat and the schnapps together were too much for them. They opened the door of our car just a little, to get air to breathe. Then I knew I should have my chance. I must say for them that they were good sorts, apart from their drunkenness. Landwehr soldiers; not at all like the non-com in charge, who was a brute. First thing he did when taking me prisoner was to kick me. One of our lieutenants, captured with me, was kicked so as to be badly injured. If you know what a Prussian officer’s boot is like, you will understand. They ought to be put in museums as curiosities, those boots.

“I watched for my opportunity when the soldiers were very drunk and not noticing. We’d been going a long while; rate, eighteen or twenty miles an hour. No way for me to see where we were nor what obstacles lay out there. I just made for the door, jerked it wider, and jumped on the chance of landing somewhere and not being killed. As it happened, I only hurt my knee. Scrambling to my feet, I limped off, to get as far as possible from the railway. When I dared stop, I got my bearings and started westward.”

"By the stars?" murmured the little knitter, romantically.

"No, by my compass. Hidden in my puttees, it escaped the men who searched me. They confiscated everything else, except my money. When I left for the front, I didn't want to make much; said it would only be lost if I was killed, or stolen if I fell prisoner. But my"—he hesitated—"my family insisted that I must take a large sum. Well, if it hadn't been for that, I shouldn't be here now. Do you know how much I have left out of a thousand francs? Barely forty!"

"So you started westward," prompted the English-looking civilian.

"Yes. I thought if our troops had broken through the lines I might reach them, somehow. Not much to gamble on, but as good as anything I could think of. Thinking wasn't easy, either. I'd had a touch of gas, though I was a mile away from the main attack where men were falling and dying like flies. But a suggestion of the fumes came our way, and rather blinded and very much stupefied us for a time, though we weren't really ill. It was a dreadful sight, far off—that heavy, greenish cloud, close to the ground, creeping along and enveloping the trench as a cloth slips over a table's edge; it rose high, too, some eighty feet, I should judge, turning gradually to a greenish yellow. And wasn't it strong! Men who stooped to pick up their guns after dropping them, or who fell at the first contact, never got up again. We had masks, only we weren't wearing them; some of us—it was my case, for instance—were detailed on special duties. Then the Germans attacked all along the line. First thing I knew my gun lay on the ground and several bayonets were against my chest. What could I do?"

"There were no after effects?" asked the English-looking civilian.

"Oh, yes; but mild; I hadn't been really gassed, you know. My throat got chronically inflamed, and my eyes remained watery for weeks. But that was nothing."

"The Boches didn't maltreat you, at least?" queried the little lady.

"Only kicked me to make me be good. They finished off a number of our men who were badly wounded, though; so as to send only the sound ones back to work for them in camps, I suppose. I was lucky enough to be considered sound. When I tumbled out of that train and hurt my knee, adding that to a bad headache and what I've already described, I felt as if I didn't care to go far. Yet there was nothing else to be done. I didn't dare inquire my way, as you can imagine; so I was bound to wander aside and in loops.

"When daylight came, I got civilian clothes. Some good people, Belgians, wanted to give them to me, but I insisted on paying five francs. More to make sure of their good-will than anything else. Peasant clothes were what I had chosen; I was to be a young peasant looking for work.

"I had to learn something about the country, and also get a notion of the accent and pick up a vocabulary. So as to avoid attention, I used to hide during the entire day, and start walking westward as soon as night came. To eat, I depended mainly on what I could find in the fields. Afraid to go about buying or begging food, you see. When I had to choose between showing myself or starving, I would observe people before approaching. My story about the young peasant, who hadn't been taken for the army because his heart was wrong, went

down with everybody I spoke to, though many knew better I'm sure. Still, I might run across a traitor; and German spies and agents were everywhere. I got to know them by their ways and appearance, so I avoided any I spotted; but one might have come up suddenly.

"Beet-root, turnips, carrots, cabbage, anything that grew was good enough. Beet-root was the best—it served as dessert. Sometimes I went hungry. That didn't matter much; the awful thing was when I had to go thirsty. Beet-root saved me several times, being food and drink; the European bread-and-water tree. When vegetables ran short in a field, it was often because of a battle there at one period or another. Then I would search for tins of preserved stuff. Sometimes I would find one that had belonged to a dead soldier. Not nice to think of; but I do the thinking now. Then, I was hungry.

"Of course I would be reduced to buying food, at times. Once I bought a sausage; I was carrying it in a bag a peasant had given me, when I came to a deserted house guarded by a lonely little dog. The thinnest thing I ever saw. He must have been for days and days without food. You ought to have seen him eat that sausage! Does me good to remember it. He wanted to follow me, afterwards, and I thought he and I would make a good pair, both homeless and half-starved. So we travelled on together. In a village some kind-looking people asked me to give him to them. He wanted to stay with me, and I'd grown attached to him; but I knew he ought to take a home while he could get it. So I went on alone."

"Did you actually see our trenches from the German side?" asked the little knitter.

"Luckily not. Though my knee got worse, my general

bruises improved as days went by, and then I recovered something of my senses. Even supposing I could capture three or four lines of German trenches from behind, which wasn't really likely, you know, I would have stood a poor chance, marching full into the face of our own trenches, rigged out as I was. That game was no good, so I made up my mind to steer northeast and get out by way of Holland, if I took a year to do it."

"You must have wandered very far and very long!" sighed the little lady. The clicking of her needles had never ceased.

"With rheumatism settling in my knee, too," he said. "If I didn't dare buy food, you can imagine I didn't dare get medical help. Sleeping out in the open when winter comes, without even a blanket, isn't particularly good for the constitution. As a soldier, I'd slept in clover—in a sleeping-sack. But this was a case of bare ground."

"What were you afraid of?" asked the English-looking civilian. "There must be some Belgians left in Belgium—and the Germans can't be everywhere at once."

"If they were anywhere near, I was in danger of being denounced as a soldier; and the natives might have taken me for a spy. When I couldn't help showing myself, I spent whatever money was necessary for hushing people. Once, in a village where there were German soldiers, a peasant came up to me. He said, '*Toi soldat.*' I denied it. He said again, 'You're a soldier'—still in his dialect. He was rough, and poor-looking; two starving children with him. I decided I must bribe, and bribe high. But money was going fast at this game. I hesitated an instant, calculating what was the utmost I dared give for my life this time. All of a sudden he drew a five-

franc piece from his pocket and tried to give it to me. 'You're a soldier!' he said. 'You don't trust me! I'll help you!' He spoke funny, broken French: '*Toi soldat! Toi pas confiance en moi! Moi aider toi!*' I told him to keep the money for his children; that wasn't what I needed. My life depended on avoiding attention; so if he really wanted to help me, please go away."

The Sergeant lighted another cigarette, after passing round the package; this time, he included the English-looking civilian. Smoking silently for some moments, he rested his eyes deliberately on each of those who had been his listeners. It was a swift, sliding glance, which always ended far to one side or on the floor.

"You notice? Funny! I can't look a single one of you in the eye," he said. "Must seem compromising—shady character, and all that. A habit I got into. I knew the only way to avoid attention was by never looking at anybody. But I had to know what was going on about me, and hear what people said. So I practiced never looking straight at anything, and seeing a little out of the corner of my eyes; and when I was compelled to look straight, I'd glide my eyes away as quick as I could. Took a lot of practice before it came naturally. Now, I find it hard to look straight—my eyes slip away of themselves!"

"Incidentally, they must have seen a great deal, all the same," the civilian suggested.

"Yes. But remember I had to avoid places where much was occurring. Went to Brussels, though; my knee had to be seen to, I couldn't walk any more, and that seemed the safest town because the biggest. Besides, at Brussels there's a hospital run by French civilians. The surgeon observed me closely. 'Surely——' he began.

'Yes, but don't give me away!' I whispered. He'd been regimental surgeon at my first base in France!"

"And then?"

"Then I got better, and took to the road once more. By that time I'd covered quite a lot of country and got a pretty good idea of the way things were." He searched in his pocket and produced a note-book. "I wish I could have taken notes. All this I made up from memory, in Holland. I had destroyed whatever papers were left to me, of course, so the Germans shouldn't be able to identify me if I got caught. My military *livret* had disappeared rather peculiarly. The Germans thought I was a second lieutenant because the only gold braid I'd been able to get was narrow instead of broad; so they were treating me as an officer, and you may be sure I didn't deceive them. But my official papers gave me away, and the *sous-off* who held them went to correct the mistake. By the greatest luck, one of our shells came along and mixed him all up with what remained of my property!"

"Did you witness any atrocities?" asked the little knitter in an awed tone. Somehow, atrocities always seem to fascinate little knitters in trains.

"I have a good deal of evidence here; they have been exaggerated by report, you know, but they were real. My regimental doctor had dealt with one particularly horrible case, there in Brussels—a baby nine months old, with both hands cut off at the wrist and both feet at the ankle. The mother asked the doctor if it wouldn't be better to chloroform it before it grew old enough to know."

There was a silence. He broke it himself:

"Those weren't the things I wanted to learn. I'm a soldier, and I was after military things."

He turned the pages of his note-book, while the train rolled on. No one spoke. Presently he began again:

"I *was* taken for a spy—but luckily I was safe, then. I managed to slip across the frontier to Holland, and turned up at a Belgian consulate to ask for a passport. I hadn't a single paper to identify me. But my trouble didn't come there.

"The consul said, 'What's your nationality?' I answered, 'French.' He said, 'Where do you want to go?' I answered, 'England.' He said, 'What do you want to do there?' 'Work,' I said. Then he asked me, answering the question himself, 'Not to be a soldier? No!' That was his formula.

"Several young Belgians came in who had crossed the frontier together, although it's harder and harder to do. They all wanted to go to England to 'work,' and of each one he asked, answering himself, 'Not to be a soldier? No!' Being the consul of an allied power, he could give me a passport as a Frenchman; and so he did, though it's a Belgian passport. That being done without difficulty, I started off feeling as if I were almost home again.

"But the British consul at Rotterdam wasn't so easy. Asked me a lot of questions, trying to trip me up. Wanted to know if I spoke German—and I do, six words! Considered my knowledge of English very compromising. Finally told me I might leave, but not that day—the next. If he had had me arrested that night, I shouldn't have been a bit surprised. But I suppose he couldn't have taken me up in a neutral country, and he had a better scheme. I left next day, quite happy,—and found myself the object of especial and not flattering attentions at Folkestone. My description, with a statement of my case, had been sent on in advance."

"But you got through all right?" questioned the civilian.

"Rather, or I shouldn't be here," the other said simply.

By a happy inspiration, the little knitter asked what the civilian had evidently been about to ask next. It came more gracefully from her.

"How did you get across the frontier to Holland? You forgot to tell us."

"No. I didn't forget." The Sergeant paused and reflected while putting away his note-book. "But that's one of the things I can't talk about, much. Shouldn't like to get any of my Belgian friends into trouble, you understand."

"Oh! So they managed it for you?"

"It began with the father of the starving children. He followed me without my knowing it, and crept up that night as I lay under a bush. I'm not ashamed to say I was frightened when he touched me. Thought myself caught, you know. And it seemed hard, after so many months and efforts! I wouldn't have minded being killed in battle, or when jumping from the train, or else being caught and shot within a few weeks. At all events I didn't mind the idea of it. But to be bagged as I slept under a bush, after months and months of tramping and dodging and starving—I hated the idea of dying then! But he whispered: '*Soldat—moi ami!*'"

"I recognised his voice and his idiom. He went on to tell me that he would help me to hide for some days, and would get in touch with his circle of friends. After I'd been in his cellar several days, he said all was ready and lent me his own passport to go as far as the next town. Meant death for him as well as for myself if I'd been caught. I hid again, with the help of new friends, in

this town, and went on once more with another borrowed passport. This continued until I reached the proper point near the frontier. It seemed to be a whole system, very perfect, working without a flaw."

"But I thought the frontier bristled with sentinels and was a maze of wires," the civilian ventured.

"Both terms are mild, considering. But if you've practiced skulking in fields and under hedges for a good many months, you may creep very close to a sentinel, and can lie like dead for quite a few hours—knowing you will be dead sure enough if you're seen. As for their wires and electricity and the rest, rubber gloves sometimes help. It's just possible, too, that special points of the frontier must be chosen, because of the nature of their soil. But that's a problem I shall let you work out for yourself."

The train halted abruptly. A guard passed by the windows, ordering all passengers to alight. The sedate and reserved lady and gentleman seized upon their bags and fled, after darting alarmed glances at the compromising sergeant. The little lady and the English-looking civilian pluckily remained with him. The other travellers had already left the train, at a previous station.

"I have been very much interested in what you had to say," the civilian remarked.

The Sergeant laughed:

"Why, I have simply rattled on about anything that passed through my mind! After so many months of either silence or discretion, you can't imagine what it means to be able to turn one's tongue loose among one's own people. Even in England I had to be rather careful, you know; couldn't make friends very well, because my papers weren't exactly conventional, and I didn't know

a soul in the whole country who could identify me. And then my note-book might have looked queer, among strangers."

"That must be full of interesting things," the civilian said meditatively.

The Sergeant, equally meditative but with eyes fixed very positively on distant objects, did not appear to have heard.

"Might I see that note-book?" the civilian asked.

"Oh, impossible!" the Sergeant exclaimed. "This information is for my government, if it can be of any use."

The passengers ahead, having hesitated in confusion for some minutes, were now streaming out of the station. Guards instructed them to follow the country road to their right.

"Why did they stop us? What are they going to do to us?" the little lady inquired nervously. But she kept close to the Sergeant.

"Only a collision beyond that bridge you see in the distance. Another train is waiting for us there. Both tracks are blocked."

"How do you know?" demanded the civilian.

"Because I have learned to see without looking and hear without listening," the Sergeant answered quietly.

The three walked on together for nearly half a mile. It appeared that a collision had blocked one track; a crane had been brought to clear this, and had been dropped across the second track by inexperienced workmen replacing their mobilised brothers. The train in waiting was already filled with passengers from both the collided trains. The Sergeant helped several ladies into a first-class compartment before getting in himself; the civilian followed.

That they were crowded, none could have denied. But none complained save an old gentleman in an overcoat, a muffler, a sweater, and wristlets, holding a paper-backed novel in one hand and a paper-knife in the other; he was furthermore provided with a foot-warmer. He darted furious glances from his corner, and grumbled intermittently for four hours about people who forced themselves into other people's compartments. Several times he repeated that such was war, that prior to the infamous aggression of which France had been victim no one would have dared behave so, and that the Germans must be made to pay heavily for this and other hardships.

Conversation was impossible in such an atmosphere. The little lady knitted with each elbow in the stomach of a neighbour; the Sergeant, gazing through the window at the landscape, seemed completely happy; and the English-looking civilian, squeezed into a tiny place where the arm of a seat ought to have been, thought profoundly.

They reached Paris. The little lady shook hands with the Sergeant and soulfully wished him more fighting and endless good-fortune. The civilian lingered.

"May I walk a little way with you, M. Clermont?" he asked, as they stood on the platform.

Paul turned, thoroughly amazed.

"I should like to know, first, who you are and how you know me?"

The other laughed:

"If your name is a confidential matter, you should not wave your passport about so freely. I have had to become something of an observer, also, by force of circumstances. I am an American war correspondent." He took out a card.

"A war correspondent—in trains?"

"As good a place as another, when we can't be at the front. I have been wondering if you would tell me a little more. There's that note-book; perhaps you would have no objection——"

"Or perhaps I would!" said Paul.

"Then won't you, at least, have a drink with me, on the Boulevard? I owe you something for the conversation we have already had."

Paul had been looking about him, as if expecting somebody; they had passed the gates, and reached the station restaurant.

"We might stop here, a moment," he said. "A cup of tea would taste good to me, especially if a slice of bread went with it. The last time I ate was eleven hours ago."

"I should say you needed some wine to brace you up; especially after such experiences," the journalist urged.

"Oh, thanks—we're not supposed to drink!"

"Only a little good wine—and at this hour——" the tempter insisted.

"I'm not quite sure about the regulations," said Paul, "but our tastes grow very simple. This is really good, to our thinking." He tapped the tea-pot. "No cigars, thank you; plain cigarettes do nicely. You don't know how the French soldier has changed. It's no longer a man's idea of happiness to get to a café and spend hours sipping a drink or playing cards or dominoes; he wants to get home, or else to go to a good old-fashioned play or the cinema. More fun than excesses ever used to be. Those of us who haven't died have become a healthy, reasonable race; class prejudice has died down, and so have political and religious animosities; there aren't any quarrels or discussions or jealousies in the trenches——"

"Not in the trenches," repeated the journalist.

"No," Paul went on, so earnestly that he missed the point. "It's astonishing to note how well the aristocrat and the workman, the priest and the teacher, and all that, can agree, when working at the same job. The blacksmith and the bricklayer no longer scorn educated men, and the gentleman has no occasion to patronise the sweat of other people's brows."

"War promoting harmony—still in the trenches. How long do you expect this to last?"

"Don't know; the wonderful thing is that it should be here at all. Let's be content with that. Abstinence has had much to do with this—which is another point gained. Men began by finding they were less fit after drinking alcohol; then they ceased to care for the stuff. As for our so-called 'hygienic drinks'—light red or white wine—we get enough of that, and sour enough, to cure us completely! They tried sending water in barrels, but it had to be dosed first, to kill the germs or something. Whew! Smelt like an apothecary's shop. We said we would wait till we got to the hospital for our dose of disinfectants, thank you!"

The journalist was probably preparing another charge at the note-book, when Paul suddenly yelled out and fled, upsetting a chair and breaking a glass. For I had just come up, his telegram to me having suffered delays and my journey having added still more.

We were together for some days, while his "military situation" was being straightened out; during which time he told me of his wanderings. But I must confess that I have drawn freely, in editing the present chapter, upon a magazine article recently sent to Paul, in my care, by the war correspondent to whom he had "given no information," as he solemnly assured me at the time.

IV

A WAVE of intense unrest swept over the plain and up the hill which guarded it to the south. Men on duty in the trenches fingered their guns lovingly; men stationed above in fortresses of earth and logs twitched nervously. "It's coming!" they whispered. "God knows it's taken long enough. But now, it's coming!"

Ended, the patient wait of ceaseless privation and frequent suffering; ended, the heart-racking sense that, though strong, they were powerless; ended, the humiliating thought that, whereas their blood had been freely shed and their land was still partly held, they were riveted to idleness. At last, an offensive was at hand in their region, a broad advance so often heralded and invariably delayed, an action such as others had tried but they had been denied. To gain a few yards, or else to cling to what they defended, had been a Herculean effort; and had yet been long and vain as the toil of Sisyphus. But what matter now—now that their real hour had come!

How had they learned of it? No officer had taken them into the secret. Had they read in the looks of their chiefs, more preoccupied than usual, and even kinder than before? Had the God whom they invoked in the simple faith and manly courage of their soldier-hearts, after feigning to ignore Him during days of pleasure, whispered to them that many would soon be in another sphere and some be acclaimed heroes in their own? Perhaps; but also they had understood aright the voices roaring night and day, material voices whose cords were of steel and whose breath was of flame, and whose argument burst to rend, kill, scatter. For a night and a day, and again a night and a day, deafening, all-pervading, their roar had come sharp,

swift, sure as the crack of machine-guns—though each cried alone, and was of field or siege caliber. Once, for a few instants, there had been a break. Men had stirred anxiously, had raised their hands to their heads, had ventured glances above the trench at peril of their lives. Then the cracking, the roaring, the shaking came once more with increased fury; the men subsided, bewildered and happy, to watch the puffs of cloud by day, the tongues of fire by night.

“On all the line,” they said. “Means a general attack,” they said. “Yes, this time it’s really coming.”

“For those two days and nights, the enemy had not answered, or only in a desultory sort of way. We weren’t positive whether this meant shortness of ammunition, or else waiting to send a whirlwind bombardment which might leave nothing of us.”

Paul spoke to me from his bed at the Marquise de Vervillers’s ambulance in Paris. Several machine-gun bullets had struck his right arm, above the elbow, doing havoc among the muscles but missing the bone.

“I had been on duty for more than twenty-four hours, either because it was my turn or because I wanted to be about,” he continued. “Then, in the afternoon of the third day, I went into one of our bomb-proofs to get some sleep. But how could it have been possible? Not that I minded the racket. We’re used to that. The thing was that any moment might bring the enemy’s reply, or the order to get ready for our charge.

“A general attack! Think what that meant to us. I grow excited now, just remembering the way I felt. The best of all our skirmishes, taken and put together in a row, wouldn’t represent as much as the first dash we should

make. No; I couldn't sleep. So I went out and looked through a loop-hole.

"The whole landscape had changed. Already seamed with trenches, the plain was now ripped and wrenched by bombs and mines until it was like a vast, whitish steppe. Where there had been clumps of trees, I saw only shreds of trunks; where there had been trenches I saw only confusion or else gaping, barren holes. We had been rebuilding, daily, our first-and second-line trenches, levelled in long spaces by shells or torpedoes; but of late we hadn't done more than pile up sacks of earth against the parapets. The Germans were making no apparent effort to repair the damage to their lines. The only spot on the landscape which an unmilitary eye could have recognised was the wreck of that farmhouse to which Berral had gone for flowers. Repeated engagements, and our winning of the hamlet of — (now completely razed), had cut off the Germans from access to it. We didn't occupy it, because the position was so exposed, but we could reach it as we pleased. Though bombs and small shells had struck it, the ruin still held together. We spared what was left, because it might be of use for observations when we advanced; the Boches neglected it apparently from indifference. So, there was that one small ruin of a house, in that wide ruin of a plain. Talk of dramatic effects! No theatre, with all the artifices at its command, ever presented such a tragic spectacle as that death-like plain across which death continued to howl.

"And still, no answer to our fire; or no answer worth mentioning. We could only listen to our shells and vibrate with the earth, while our impatience had to be bridled on the very edge of our effort of efforts."

The weather, which had been clear, changed in the

afternoon; presently drops fell. Apprehension filled the men lest the attack be postponed, should rain set in. Their exasperation reached a climax rendering them capable of breaking from the trenches on their own initiative.

"I found Berral and his group, including Constant, in that frame of mind. They muttered: 'If we could move down to the first line, we should know what to do.' 'Whatever the weather, your energies won't be wasted—provided you behave yourselves,' I told them. They had to take my word for it, and luckily they did. What I couldn't say frankly until the officers had spoken, was that we had gone so far we couldn't have stopped.

"By the precision of our aim, I knew we must have wrought havoc in the German mazes, using shrapnel first to chop the wire and then heavy shells to bury the whole; and with my glasses I could see many of their earth-forts and shelters; yards deep, ripped up as if they had been tin roofs. We were using the new big shells, adjusted to explode only after sinking eight or nine feet, so that defences and defenders were bound to go all together. In our region alone, we sent seventy-five thousand shells a day for those three days; and it must have been so along the whole line. We had ammunition in any quantity; large stores of provisions and supplies of water were ready to be brought forward as soon as we started on the rush; we had dug parallels for the advance of reinforcements, and sapped out mines far beyond what might have been thought possible—a feat of engineering! Of course we had to advance while we could. Observation posts had already reported the enemy's communications as cut off by our cross-fire: for two days and a half no food had reached them at some points, and it was probable ammunition also would fail them. But there was even more. As night

closed down, standing on the French side of our hill, I saw our fresh troops being brought up from the rear, by motors. Where trenches were available, men slipped into them; thousands were grouped in the huge holes torn by German mines and shells; others lay flat on the ground, in the rain. Thousands, thousands, thousands of them—and all to follow us! For we, who had borne the brunt of the months of waiting there, were to have the honour of going first. No, I had no fear of the attack being postponed, though I couldn't tell our boys all I had learned and seen.

“At dark, rain began to fall fast and heavy. The ground, soggy from previous rains, couldn't absorb any more, though these last days had been dry. The trenches ran with water; the platforms of twigs beneath our feet would have floated like rafts if we hadn't been there to hold them down. But what matter? We were worked up to so high a pitch that we couldn't have minded anything—except perhaps failure.

“Captain de Vervillers came to us: ‘My children, it's for to-morrow morning.’ You ought to have heard the chorus of—breaths! For we couldn't cheer. No yell of enthusiasm, no clamour of praise, was ever more eloquent than those united breaths. It seemed to me I could hear the throb of heart-beats all round me. I may have heard only my own, making enough noise for scores.”

The Captain went on to explain the plan of battle. At a concerted moment, they were to leap out and charge due north. Behind the first trench, the regiment was to be drawn up in the night, a formation of three columns consisting of a battalion each, separated by machine-guns and flanked by them. Each battalion-column was subdivided into smaller columns, representing companies, drawn up four deep. Behind them, reinforcements would wait

ready to pour forward through communication trenches, unexposed until the moment they, too, were to charge.

Paul continued:

"The Germans had got wind that we planned something, long before our preparation started. The first notion we got of what lay ahead came from them. It was now two weeks since they had begun to poke fun at us, wiggling the barrels of their guns over the tops of their defences, and sometimes putting rag dolls on the ends. The wind would bring us snatches from the chorus of 'Viens, Poupoule.' They thought we wouldn't dare try. Just wouldn't we! But you can fancy the sort of exasperation into which they threw our men. No better turn could have been done to us. For it wasn't the sort of emotion which wears off. Our ranks don't consist of the old type of happy-go-lucky jokers, of *je-m'en-fichistes*, and we haven't got only men who plainly and simply do their duty. No! There's more underlying the character of the French soldier as war has shaped him. He is grave, intrepid, resolute as a Roman legionary. You know what a general, and a cavalry general at that, said of the French infantryman of to-day: 'He deserves that we should go down on our knees before him'—'*Il est à se mettre à genoux devant!*'"

The Colonel came to assure himself that the orders were understood; the regiment was moved down to the place it should occupy.

In its very terror, the night was of marvellous beauty. Flares of cannon or of bursting shell pierced at every moment the sheets of rain, whose mass, with the resilient density of fluid, closed in where solidity would have been rent to irretrievable fragments. Long fingers of flashlight, accusing, menacing, would stroke the heavens and cleave the elements, to break upon the earth, hungry after

morsels that bided annihilation. The horizon was the rim of a vast brazier turning the most baleful of nights into the most appalling of days. Ever and anon, bursting the rhythmic flash of lights, and roar of explosions, and tremblings of earth which ceased not for a second, a mightier flare, a mightier thunder, a mightier convulsion of the land's foundations, would mark a mine set off, an area of soil and wood, a mass of human atoms hurled into the water-charged air, amid whirls of party-coloured flame, joy-fires of Hades.

Held by the fascination of the scene, awed by the responsibility in which he must share, absorbing every impression which his physical nature might yet receive, Paul lay on the saturated earth like his comrades, but slightly apart from them and not seeking sleep.

Amid the flashes of gun, shell, fuse, mine, searchlight, which starred and streaked the earth's surface, as a sky might appear if all its bodies burst suddenly into showers of meteors, he observed a tiny light quite near. Not an aeroplane light. Its steadiness first drew his attention, then its modesty retained him. Or perhaps the modesty was what awoke the first conscious appeal: as a man may heed a whisper when a crowd's yelling has dulled his ears to mere volume of sound. Among these thousands of lights, this alone shone modestly, this alone failed to move. Then it did move, though its power was not increased. The movement was slow; up and down, twice.

Paul watched steadily. It was fixed, once more. His eyes had deceived him, perhaps.

But suppose they had? Suppose the light were stationary? Why should it be there, quiet and unassuming among all these swift, blatant bursts? Whence could it come, and what might it mean?

As he put the last question to himself, it again moved. Not up and down: from left to right—twice.

Understanding came so quickly that the report of his rifle cracked before the thought was finished. At once, the light vanished.

He had fired into the ground-floor window of the ruined farmhouse.

The light and the shot passed unperceived by Paul's neighbours. He waited. Some minutes went by, neither in silence nor in blackness, surely, yet they seemed dark and still to Paul, who thought only of the light.

Again it came—but higher-pitched. Again the movement, up and down, twice; again the pause; and again, left to right, twice. Then again it vanished: for Paul had fired into the window of what had been an upper storey.

A hand rested on his left arm, a voice breathed:

"It's Berral, Sergeant. There's been a light behind."

"Before, you mean," Paul corrected.

"No. Behind. In a tree. I fired into it, and it disappeared."

"Behind! An answer, then."

"A signal, at all events," Berral went on. Evidently, he knew nothing of what had occurred at the farmhouse. "I crept close, but couldn't find trace of anybody. So I went towards the barbed wire."

"If you had been shot by a sentinel, you would have had no one to thank but yourself. This is no night for individual experiments."

"It's as good a night as another for catching a spy, Sergeant. I'm going back, and I want you with

me. I saw a shadow and fired, but missed. When that shadow comes back, there must be two of us to catch him."

"Krauss?" Paul exclaimed.

"That's what I think."

"Our lieutenant's orderly, and an Alsatian!" Paul protested.

"Yes; if he is an Alsatian," Berral grumbled. "What do we know about him? How can we tell where he came from? Why shouldn't he have been dropped in our lines some months ago by a Boche aeroplane?"

It was true that little or nothing had been ascertained about this supposed Alsatian, plausible of speech, varied in accomplishments, and fearless to foolhardiness. He had claimed to be a refugee from a village of the region, but boasted of Alsatian birth; he had produced papers confirming his statements, and had begged for permission to enlist and avenge his unhappy country; he had been taken as orderly by Lieutenant de Falonges because of his abilities and resourcefulness.

Paul and Berral slipped along the ground, were successful in appeasing several sentries, were missed by one or two shots, and reached the barbed wires Berral had indicated. They waited, soundless and motionless, for several hours, before Paul felt a swift, firm pressure on his shoulder. An instant later, they had covered with their rifles a man creeping towards them.

The very atmosphere flamed and flared about them; in this clear, awful night-light, they recognised Krauss, the model orderly.

"Confidential mission for my lieutenant," the man said calmly.

"Good. We shall take you to him," said Paul.

"My lieutenant doesn't need interference from his subordinates," Krauss tossed back insolently.

"But I demand obedience from the ranks," Paul said.

"I was only verifying the state of the wires." Krauss had changed tone.

"You first plead a confidential mission, and then betray it rather than report on it?" Paul asked.

Krauss did not speak at once; his mouth hardened, his hands twitched.

"Come, comrades——" he began.

"Lead this man to Lieutenant de Falonges," Paul ordered, addressing two soldiers who had drawn near. "If he tries to bolt, or as much as stirs an arm, kill him. We are following."

Having got so far in his story, Paul stopped.

"Well?" I prompted.

"Oh, why tell the rest? It was true. The Lieutenant threw up both hands in helpless horror. He had ridiculed my reports on the strength of Berral's statements, several times in the preceding weeks.

"Krauss contradicted himself, tried the faithful-service dodge, grew sullen and indignant, finally collapsed and confessed. He recovered only enough energy to proclaim himself a Prussian and to glory in his behaviour, when they led him away to be shot.

"I went back to my own place. Several of our shells, annihilating the farmhouse, brought light and fumes and tremors nearer to us than ever. I was creeping among men laid out like corpses on every side. Just then, the cold grey of dawn began to spread its chill over the flares surrounding us."

With the day, the artillery increased its uproar. The General strolled by, fully exposed, smoking his pipe, talking

familiarly with the men, making topographical remarks and recalling the orders already given. Colonels followed his example.

"You will have to run your best, boys; you have warm work ahead!" said Captain de Vervillers, twisting his moustache. He spoke as if planning a foot-ball rush. And of such a nature, indeed, was the attack to be.

Andrésy, lying near Paul, cried out:

"I think I'm hit. I haven't room to turn. Look for me, and see!"

No need to look; Paul had seen his friend's left leg severed beneath the knee, by a piece of shell.

"Old man, your leg is gone," he said.

"Oh——! Oh, the swine!" moaned Andrésy.

At that instant, the appointed time was reached. Needing no command, the first ranks sprang from trenches, from shell-holes, from mine-caverns, from the bare ground where men had lain unprotected. Like hordes of ants they swarmed out, hurrying onward, irresistible by their mass and by their united power of will.

As Paul leaped, a cheer close behind him, weak and harrowing, made him half-look back, without stopping. Andrésy, clinging to the trench's edge, had drawn himself up, in semblance of rising with his mates; tottering, blood-stained, he swung there cheering—then the next shell claimed him, and he crumpled away, headless, in shapeless shreds.

A curtain of smoke, greyish yellow, hemmed in the horizon like a gigantic panorama; thin trails stretched out across the country, forming frail illusive walls, surer barriers than steel or masonry. Northward across the plain, and then up a slight incline to the left or into the valley of the little river to the right, all were to charge alike

for several hundred yards. Within this space, their sole chance depended on such swiftness that the enemy's guns could not be trained on them. Thereafter the action was to vary. In some places, mazes of wire had been but slightly touched by the preparation, and there the fighting would be furious; in others, one or two trenches and their wires, partly or totally demolished, would be carried with bayonets but resistance waited beyond; in others yet, no vestige of defences remained, and from five to eight lines would be carried in rapid succession.

The lot of Paul's brigade had been to charge up an incline seamed with holes and slippery from rain.

"The black hail of machine-guns tried to stop us. Stop us? They didn't know what we were! Stop us! We poured into our first objective—a little advanced fortress so strong that it had held pretty well against our bombardment—we poured into it, I say, as if there was nobody to defend it. And—and there wasn't.

"Nobody. We found only machine-guns worked by electric wires; and destroyed them. In the face of a like fire, we charged the trench beyond, to find again mere mechanisms dealing death. On we went, maddened by disgust and a sort of uncanny fear. The next trench, we carried against a handful of Germans; they were firing machine-guns and had apparently been working those we had already met. Here, the trench was shattered, and there were many dead; whole bunches of bodies had been cast together in heaps, or piled as defences, mixed in with baskets of earth. But our real work lay still beyond. We charged towards the third trench—to stagger under a whirl of shells coming from several directions at once."

Paul had been stirring fretfully in his white bed; a feverish flush had been growing in his cheeks. He quivered,

now, for some moments. When he spoke again, he was very pale.

"We knew something had gone wrong. Our regiment was leading; the Colonel ordered us to lie down. The captains and the lieutenants were the last to obey—those of them who survived. For our officers had charged at the head of their men, and been killed right and left. Tradition—tradition—it dies hard, but gloriously! The Colonel did not obey himself; he was torn to pieces as the last captain lay down, the Senior Captain, the Marquis de Vervillers.

"I couldn't see much; to raise one's head meant death. A corporal near me was killed, passing his tinder-box to a neighbour; his forehead had bobbed up barely an inch. Most of us had started to smoke, to help us keep quiet and feel dry. We might have to wait so until nightfall, not moving, and not able to reach the food in our sacks. Men were being killed or wounded every minute; we would hear the 'plump', perhaps, but no other sound. Not one of our men forgot his comrades, in his own sufferings. For, though death comes to mean nothing to us and we think nothing of killing,—when we hear screams from a something lying next to us, a something that was alive and well, like us, a moment ago and that wears breeches like ours, we—can't bear it, somehow.

"Having had time to think, I began to understand. What had happened was that the Germans had left the little advanced fortress and the first trench, and also most of the second trench, with only machine-gun garrisons in a length of four hundred yards. Breaking through there and reaching the third line, we got where they could fire on us from the front and from both sides and slightly from behind. Yet this wasn't the worst. By advancing too quickly at this point where the outward condition of the

defences announced sharp resistance, we had got ahead of the time fixed for our artillery to lengthen its range—we were being hashed up by our own guns too.

“Captain de Vervillers had taken over the command; he and Lieutenant de Falonges conferred together. Our course was evidently to signal a ‘stop’ to our artillery, though we should be offered as targets to the enemy; we were so near that the Boches couldn’t miss us.

“The Lieutenant crawled away, and rose to his full height. He stood there like a figure of Liberty—like a Greek at Marathon—like anything sublime you can recall from history or philosophy, or religion either, for that matter. He fell, killed outright; the first to go in that attempt which alone could save us.

“Others succeeded him. Berral, for instance, who died of his wound during the night, poor chap; he lay next to me, his head on my left side. It meant death or serious wounding for all who volunteered. One or two, bowled over by a shot that didn’t kill or maim them, were up again at once, and signalled until genuinely knocked out. After a while, the fire of our artillery ceased.

“Night came. No retreat was possible, and nobody wanted it. Under cover of the dark, our men began to dig a crescent-shaped trench, determined to hold that new position. When dawn appeared, we were protected, and began to fight the trenches near us; our artillery, brought forward into the open, supported us finely. Reinforcements charged to our rescue, too. They ought to have come before, but probably thought us hopelessly done for.”

“With such heavy losses among officers, you must have had sergeants acting as lieutenants,” I said.

“Why, in the field ambulance, I heard about a sergeant who led back a whole regiment!”

"You yourself, then, may have——"

"Oh—I! Missed my chance. Hiding ingloriously in a shell-hole, like the other wounded. This blown up."

With his left hand he pointed to his right arm. I noticed that the first joint of the middle finger was missing.

"Another wound? And on that hand? You never told me."

"Nail cut rather too close, that's all," he smiled. "That healed before I left the other hospital."

A pretty nurse, who seemed to know Paul well, had stopped to listen for some moments. Light broke upon her before I had gathered my wits:

"You were one of those who volunteered to signal, and signalled on until wounded a second time!"

"I did no more than the others," Paul said by way of assent. "But I was in luck. I told you that Lieutenant de Falonges himself was first? Well! By being quick—I managed to be second!"

V

ACCUSTOMED to seeing Sœur Angèle, Paul had, little by little, forgotten Mademoiselle Odette; or else remembered her as a bright figure casting a radiant glow on youthful memories. He had loved her while looking up to her, unattainable as a star; and, star-like, she had shone throughout the clear nights of yore, only to vanish in the clouds which had since shrouded the face of the earth. Mademoiselle Odette had gone for ever; but it was soothing to have Sœur Angèle near him with a look or a word always pleasant at the moment, and mayhap recalling that dream-figure of youth.

Medical questions being disposed of for the day or the hour, she would talk religion with him and make him say

his prayers. He would have said prayers uninterruptedly—barring conversation—in such company. But, to the distress of his kind friend and would-be spiritual guide, he had not got much further.

“You belong to us, my child,” Sœur Angèle would say, speaking with the maturity of vocation and of experience, though her advantage in years might be inconsiderable. “You belong to us. Were you not baptised in the Holy Church—and did you not make your first communion?”

“Yes,” Paul agreed. “I don’t remember what I did when they baptised me, but I remember my first communion as if it were yesterday.”

“The most beautiful day in your life, was it not?”

“Up to that time, yes; it was very wonderful. A great emotion. I forgot even my new clothes, and the lunch promised us at the church, and all the people coming to see us in their Sunday dress, and the music which the Marquise had said would be as good as in Paris. You know, I had thought a lot of all that, in advance, like the other children; it’s what we talked of most; the catechism lessons bored us, and we made fun of the *abbé* behind his back, and we might have wanted to drop away entirely, if we hadn’t liked meeting together and escaping work at school or at home. That’s the plain truth of it. But when the time came, I forgot everything else in that great emotion. Deep, and pure, too; I say pure, because it seemed to uplift me, and there was no reaction afterwards. I seemed to drift slowly back to earth, without a jar, and feeling better—I almost said holier. It was helpful. Only, I didn’t understand.”

“Understanding was not meant for us all, my child. Yet we can all find grace through the Holy Church. The heart must respond first; and then, God willing, the mind follows.”

"For some, perhaps," Paul answered. "But for me, dear Sœur Angèle, dogma and ritual merely bind up my heart and darken my eyes, and cut me off from the living God whom I know and feel. You need an organised, crystallised religion to connect you with God, so you are right to follow it fearlessly. I respect it, and respect you, too. But why shouldn't you respect my ideas and me, when I assure you I am better and happier without yours?"

"Respect heresy!" cried out Sœur Angèle. "Respect agnosticism and infidelity? You, Paul, ask this of me?"

"No, I never asked that. I solemnly swear I didn't!" Paul laughed.

His good-humoured attitude, and his willingness to listen before replying, made him peculiarly difficult as a venture in forcible conversion. Dogged prejudice and irascible outbursts may be worn down, with patience and persistence. But a temperate nature and a receptive while well-developed mind offer no jagged points for scaling the outer wall, and reveal so few weaknesses that the best canonical artillery exhausts itself in scattered shots.

Taken aback by Paul's ready reply on this occasion, Sœur Angèle profited by a hint her confessor had dropped the day before, when she had told him of the beautiful stray lamb to be led towards spiritual as well as physical health. "If general statements render him argumentative," the holy man had said, "bring him, through gradual concessions, to matters of application which are unquestionable and whereof you are better informed than he."

Leaving his reply unnoticed, she asked, as if changing the subject:

"Have you observed the new spirit which reigns throughout France?"

"I haven't had much opportunity for that; but I know

of the spirit which reigns in the army zone," Paul answered.

"Ah! You have observed it!" the nun triumphed. "You see as it were a new race of Frenchmen?"

"Quite."

"You see them do bravely and die bravely?"

"They could not be surpassed."

"Then—then what are you arguing about? Don't you see that you and I agree?"

"Yes—on this point," said Paul.

"On this point—but what other point is there?" she demanded. "You admit the religious renovation of our race; you admit that men, once unbelievers, once enemies of our faith, have returned to their most sacred duties; you know, as I do, of soldiers stopping *curés* and *abbés* in the streets to beg for scapularies——"

Paul's mouth opened at this interpretation of his own words and of his companions' heroism; but as his lips met again he was so moved by the kind sister's sweet, blind faith, that he neither smiled nor attempted to correct her.

She continued:

"Twice already you have been worthy to receive the Blessed Sacrament. If you would but consent to prepare your heart for it once more——"

"I know too well what it means for those who take it," Paul answered. "From reverence, I would not imitate, where they believe."

"You still doubt!" groaned the nun. "You, born and bred a Catholic, can doubt! No, impossible. It is courage you lack. You fear your uncle may cast you off."

"I don't want to hurt your feelings, Sœur Angèle," Paul said, "even though you make me out a fool or a coward."

"God help him, he is lost, irretrievably lost!" the nun moaned. "This from you, Paul Clermont, whose arm God has saved by a miracle!"

"I wish I were sure it's saved," Paul said, his face clouding.

Sœur Angèle should, following the priest's advice, have profited by this altered mood to begin a prayer or two. But the pretty young nurse, already mentioned, had just finished a task at the adjoining bed, and could not have failed to hear. The sister appealed to her:

"To think that if it had not been for dangerous influences in childhood, he would never have drifted from us! A lay school, for years, at the most important period of his youth! Then, as if that had not abounded in snares of Satan, he must come in contact with an impious foreigner. The man dares pretend to an independent religion, based on philosophy and personal readings of the Gospels!"

"Don't forget the apostles, and especially my patron saint," Paul interposed.

"But they deny our Blessed Lady!"

"Oh, no!"

"Or they esteem her only as a privileged mother! Blasphemy!" She threw up her hands. "That man, who is responsible for perverting this innocent soul, may call himself a philosopher, but he's no better than a common Protestant. That's my opinion."

"I don't know about him; but I don't worry about our *sous-officier*," the pretty nurse replied. "He is one of us, since he was baptised and made his first communion."

"And renewed it," Paul added.

"He can't escape us," the young lady pursued. "When he says wicked things it's only for the fun of horrifying

you, Sœur Angèle. He never talks so to me. Do you, Sergeant Clermont?"

No. Paul never talked so to her; never denied aught she said. He looked up to her, in fact, and admired and obeyed and worshipped her, as if—as if she had been Mademoiselle Odette of the long ago.

A very different type, though. Dark, with bright eyes and crimson lips, and a faint suggestion of pink beneath the cream of her cheeks. She was tall, but swift of movement as if she had been small; fascinating to look at, incomparably delightful to talk to, and furthermore rendered irresistible by a mystery. Not a mystery of speech nor of appearance, for nothing could have been franker than both. It was about her name. She came from Brittany, and was called de Clermont.

In the relentless suffering and recurrent fears of his first weeks, Paul had meditated much upon this. What if they were distantly related? He thought of it, dreamed of it, while not daring to mention it. And then, one day when his torment was extreme, she brought up the subject:

"Your name is the same as mine. Did you know that?"

Instantaneously, martyrdom was forgotten.

"Yes," he said. "Only—" (The hypocrite! He said *only*!)—"My father was from Brittany."

"But so am I," she said, surprised at this revelation. (I don't doubt that he looked surprised when she did, the rogue!) "My father was Baron de Clermont, of Kerzevant Castle."

"Mine was plain Albert Clermont, of the tax service."

"He had a distinction which mine was denied—dying for his country." She had heard of his end, from Paul. "Albert?" she went on. "I have known of that name in

our family. Who was your mother? You must look up all the papers, as soon as you are well enough."

"There are no more records, for those who lived in Arnan or Verviller."

"Never mind! We shall find out somehow. Do you remember your mother's name?"

"She died when I was a baby—or—or at least very young," Paul faltered. "But her name was on the birth certificate the Boches took from me; I had looked at it often. Révall, written with two l's at the end. Seems like a misspelling."

"Surely, I have heard that name. You may be my cousin!" said Mademoiselle de Clermont.

"She couldn't have meant it," Paul observed to me later. For he did not confess this promptly. "Too extraordinary, our meeting so, if we were relatives. She has never asked another question, so she didn't really care. But do you know, those words of hers were what pulled me round the corner.

"It was the worst day I have had; I couldn't bear to think of night coming. Nor was pain the only thing worrying me. The doctors had agreed that if the infection increased by morning, the arm must come off at the shoulder. No more fighting—no more chance to be useful! I think fear sent up my temperature more than the anger of the wound. Then the thought of that lovely cousin—perhaps!—wanting to believe she was my cousin, made me so happy, and brought so many delightful ideas—"Colour almost returned to his wan cheeks—"that I got control of myself, and stayed perfectly quiet all night, though I didn't sleep; and in the morning the arm was no worse, which meant it was better. I believe she spoke as she did on purpose to keep up my spirits.

Any fib is righteous, in such circumstances. But though she may have forgotten, I haven't! Wait till after the war. She shan't forget her 'cousin,' if I can have a say!"

Where I made my mistake, was in repeating these last words to Marcel Lavenu. Ever since, he has been jocularly inclined, making saucy remarks to me and writing impudent letters to Paul.

Paul's wish is that Marcel should live with me, now that Verviller has regained so much activity that I have a house of my own; Ernest has been claimed by his grandmother. I had been alone, save for Léonie, scarcely able to walk yet still rebellious against the suggestion of assistance. And I would have continued alone, since none can replace Paul. But I confess that I like to hear that stumping step hurry towards me, and the cheery call ring out: "Well, Père Aubret?"

At night, Marcel, who always scorned books, likes to talk, especially about his own adventures or Paul's, balancing the two judiciously, and never quite sure which of them makes the better hero. He has persuaded me to read aloud the whole of this manuscript, translated currently into French as I proceed. For he has been too lazy to accept my offer of English lessons. "One tongue suffices for a one-legged man," he says. Some of the passages referring to Paul have filled his bright, honest eyes with tears; others, devoted to himself, he has demanded many times over, pronouncing them excellent, if rather brief. Of the military parts, he says: "Many people will criticise them, but people who have gone through the mill will know they're true."

The ward where Paul lay was for the seriously wounded. Of the twenty now there, his case alone seemed doubtful

as a surgical proposition. The doctors spoke encouragingly to him—and held out to me a faint hope that he might remain intact with a useless, muscle-bound limb. After many weeks of infection, due mainly to the grave nature of his injury, but also to the number of hours he had lain neglected in a shell-hole, the arm had started on a dangerous course of healing only to break open again. For not one moment, however, had his spirit flagged or his resolution weakened; he was bound to get well and rejoin his comrades, or such as remained. Of his officers, not one, I believe, was left. Captain de Vervillers himself, brilliantly distinguished on that famous day, had got the Legion of Honour and a remarkable mention in the army's Order of the Day, and was acting as Major in command of an important centre.

"Perhaps you might follow him, in some capacity," the Marquise said to Paul. But, seeing his face cloud, she added tactfully: "When he returns to his regiment."

"I would more gladly follow him *there* than do anything else in the world," Paul replied.

It was her own home in Paris which she had transformed into an auxiliary ambulance, before her husband's death; and the new Marquis had approved this. The tall windows of the grand salon, which was Paul's ward, opened on a vista of lawn and trees rare even in the favoured Faubourg St. Germain. All was bright, peaceful, comforting. Sweet-faced nuns in grey dresses and white coifs, like birds of good omen, fluttered about busily, speaking softly; young ladies of the aristocracy, in the uniform of the Red Cross, qualified for the most delicate surgical nursing, were almost gentler, almost sweeter-voiced, and equally devoted. The Marquise herself, feeling the obligations

imposed upon her by rank and privilege, had taken a complete hospital course, since the beginning of the war, not sparing herself night-work, and rising at six when on day-duty; rivalling in zeal, at more than fifty years of age, with girls of twenty. Her figure had begun to bend and her features showed weariness under the strain; but her energy was inexhaustible, her good-humour unfailing, and her kindly face, now free from all artifice of fashion, had grown almost beautiful.

At least, it was beautiful to me and to many another whom she befriended. She had located Paul in Lyon whereas I, almost distraught, had lost trace of him after his brief passage in the field-hospital; and she had arranged for his transfer where her own care could help bring him back to usefulness.

When the wound healed with some prospect of permanence, the muscles had re-knit stiffened and shortened. In his dogged hopefulness, he believed this condition might be remedied. I did not undeceive him, while knowing that parts of the muscles had been completely torn away. There was scarcely a chance he might ever straighten out his arm; lengthening it to match the left arm, or bringing it back to normal flexibility, were hypothetical conditions beyond the limits of physical possibilities.

One morning I found him with drawn face, stern and uncommunicative, as he sat in the chair by his bed, wearing hospital-clothes but saving his dignity with the sergeant's police-cap on his head. At frequent intervals he would get up and walk to the end of the ward and back. A two-pound weight hung from his fore-arm, crossed upon his chest as it bade fair to remain. Some prospects of lengthening the muscles by such means had been held

out to him. While the doctors had abstained from details, Paul had read aright.

Several days passed. At last he said:

"We have got to find a way out."

"I don't understand," I said.

"For the present, I don't either," he admitted. "But I believe Mademoiselle de Clermont knows. She looked so wise when I asked to be allowed mechanical treatment."

The young nurse had stopped, smiling, beside him; his last sentences had been addressed to her.

"Who would not have looked the same!" she cried. "The doctor told you it could help only in certain cases, and that the first condition was a properly healed wound. Yours is doing nicely, for the—how many times have we had trouble with it? This time, it's decidedly better than ever before; but if you were to break it open again——?"

"How else do you expect the muscles to loosen?" Paul demanded. "Because they must be loosened; if not, I must leave the army. An officer can do without a limb; a sergeant must not only lead his men, but fight with them."

"You have fought well, and helped the cause, and won our gratitude," said Mademoiselle de Clermont. She turned to me: "Perhaps you can make him realise what it will mean if this wound gets ugly again. There's a species of dust in it; looks like an expansive bullet, added to the rest. We are proud of saving that arm; and now he wants to spoil everything, like the naughty boy he is!"

With a shake of her head, and a smile and a frown, she passed on.

"Easy for her and you to be philosophical," Paul grumbled. "But for me——" Breaking off, he asked: "Have I changed much?"

"No," I hastened to reassure him. "You are rather pale and thin, and not so strong as you will soon be, but——"

"That's not what I mean. Myself—the I—the Paul you knew—— Have I, have we, changed?"

"You have grown in many ways."

"Something isn't as it used to be."

As he said this, I thought of all the men I had seen go to the war, and of those I had seen return; and I thought of the change I had noted. Beyond all my powers of analysis, it was real and consistent in them all, whatever their differences of character. Paul alone appeared as an exception. But when speaking to me, he had never dwelt on scenes of carnage. I thought now of what he had said about this.

He went on:

"To think there was a time when brutality merely revolted me! I didn't know there were human creatures who use falsehood and treachery as the deliberate way towards brutality, and who fear, and respect from fear, brute force alone. It's kill or be killed: and we don't mind. It's go through scenes of carnage so horrible that I couldn't talk about it in a peaceful town, to a decent person: and we don't mind. It's count human life cheap and your own cheapest of all, provided you've fought out your bargain: and we don't mind. Mind? No! We want to keep at it till we're rid of this nightmare. If we must soil our hands, it's that the hands of those who come after us may be clean! That's service, isn't it?"

Getting up, he paced once more. I could see his mouth tighten each time the weight swung at his wrist, but he betrayed himself in no other way. Repeatedly he stopped quite still, attentive as if listening. Coming back towards me, he said abruptly:

"You know what they are aiming at—send me home to Verviller in a few months, with my discharge in my pocket and with an arm in each of my sleeves. But if I am to work quietly there or elsewhere, in any room or office of France or of the world, I don't need a half-dead arm on my right side! They won't listen to me—but they may listen to you. Tell them *you* wish the mechanical treatment to be tried, on the bare forlorn chance it may make me a sound man fit for the trenches. And tell them if it fails, I shall be happier with an empty sleeve than with a broken heart!"

"Bravo! That is worthy of my husband's young friend!" The Marquise de Vervillers stood near us, radiating happiness.

I addressed her sourly:

"It is boyish folly!"

"Yes. The sort of boyish folly from which a new and glorious France is being made! You are right, Paul! I may call you Paul, may I not? I am an old woman; and my husband knew you and liked you and believed in you—believed in you, remember! You are right, and I shall help you. Unless M. Aubret goes so far as to protest formally——"

"He wouldn't dare!" Paul cried, hugging me with his left arm.

"I shall have you transferred to the small ward near my dispensary, where I attend to the patients myself, instead of merely supervising," she continued. Then she added: "With the assistance of Mademoiselle de Clermont, and Sœur Angèle, of course!"

Paul's grey eyes beamed upon her a wordless joy, while his pale cheeks flushed. He looked very young, unchanged and unspoiled, with his close-cropped, velvety

hair marking, as in boyhood, the points above his forehead and revealing the fine lines of his intelligent head. For he sets to his men the example they should follow, saying: "Ordinary people do as they please; only a grocer's or a hairdresser's boy, and a sheep-like fool, need smother their heads in wool; but a wise man shouldn't and a soldier mustn't. A brain wants to breathe if it's got to work."

When the Marquise had left us, he whispered, still clinging to me with his sound arm:

"You will thank her for us both, won't you? She's not only saving me—she's preventing you from doing me a wrong!"

He was set to rowing a fictitious boat, or some like exercise; and at once the wound burst open. Patiently, he relapsed into inertness. Reaching once again the stage rendering an experiment possible, he demanded a renewal of the treatment. This time the consequences were so serious that amputation reappeared as an imminent probability.

"It's the other half of our bargain," Paul said, undisturbed, to the head surgeon who reproached him with his stubborn rashness. "If you don't cure me, then the arm goes to you."

Clean blood, a sound constitution, devoted nursing, and an indomitable will, conquered the flesh once again.

"You may congratulate yourself on your escape," the surgeon told him. "I hope this will render you more reasonable."

"I promise!" Paul replied. "Suppose we say I shall wait for an entire week after the first day it might be possible to begin?"

As I sat silently by him, he mused:

“‘A miracle’ was what Sœur Angèle said. Miracles are unaccountable things. There’s a man in this ambulance who was hit on the side of the nose; the bullet, just missing his right eye, came out grazing the lid of the left. Both eyes saved. A miracle, of course! But in the field ambulance where I was taken, there was a patient; a bullet had struck him in one eye, touched a bone, glanced off, and came out through the socket of the other eye. Couldn’t have happened more than once in thousands of similar wounds. So, a miracle. It’s the same law which one man has to thank for his sight, and the other for his blindness.”

“Why—why?” he burst out suddenly, after a pause. “That’s the question I keep asking myself. A shell exploded fifteen feet from where some comrades and I were standing; another group lay beyond; nobody was hurt. Why didn’t it fall on some of us—or why weren’t some of us where it fell? I’ve had a soup-tin, next to me on the ground, riddled with holes all at once, and I not touched. Once, I saw a friend’s skull cut in two while I looked at him, within half a yard of me; a fragment of the same shell cleared my head, though I was taller than he. Bullets have punched the earth an inch or two from my hand. Why didn’t they come nearer—or why hadn’t I thrust my hand forward? In order to be shot, I had to stand up and wave and make such a target of myself that a four-year-old boy with a pea-shooter couldn’t have missed me; and even then, I was only winged while my comrades, who did as much as I, had to die. Why is it—why?”

“Perhaps because you were meant to live, Paul; because you have work to do; because your vocation, declared in boyhood, still has its demands to make, guarding you so that destiny may be fulfilled!”

"That can't be true," he said hoarsely. With eyes fixed on me, he watched me so long and so silently that I thought him about to open his heart; then I thought he would not speak. But his eyes did not leave me. I waited.

"I still dream of those old ambitions, sometimes," he said.

I felt that he had not expressed his thought; that he had decided not to mention it, or at least not then.

"A question stops me, too, when I try to think," he went on. "I mean, a question which doesn't depend on myself. Since men haven't reached a stage where they can agree even theoretically as to what is right, how can their laws be made better?"

Unable to answer, I asked:

"Does your inner voice no longer prompt you?"

"I can't believe in it any more." He spoke so solemnly that I dared not question further.

He had his way; the treatment succeeded. His arm remains shortened not more than an inch, and may still lengthen slightly; the muscular flexibility, if not complete, has been sufficient for him to rejoin his corps. A surgical triumph, the doctors gravely inform us; Sœur Angèle insists on the miracle; Mademoiselle de Clermont teasingly asserts: "Luck!" But the Marquise de Vervillers and I say: "Paul."

His convalescence at the ambulance was so protracted, including even a course in fencing towards the end, that after his medical discharge he asked for only a six-day leave—as for a soldier home from the front. Having no reason to go far from Paris, and yet desiring country air, we went to Versailles. Perhaps we had special motives,

too; I know he visited the cemetery; and to me, the town where I shared the last months of his independent life is almost sacred.

Soon after dark, on the night before he left, we happened to pass the Cathedral whose Louis XV style, Franco-Spanish, suggested to us those churches so familiar in Lorraine and seen nowhere else in France, I believe. A bright moon in a wind-whipped sky shone near the rounded dome with its thin, globe-topped spire; below, the yellowed stone glowed smooth and fair. Lights from the broad white windows cut across our path. Responding to I know not what impulse or emotion, we stopped, turned, and tacitly agreed to enter.

Blackness filled the aspiring heights of the nave; gloom drifted down, veiling the capitals of the great round columns but shading to greyness as it fell. About us, and yet above our heads, diffused rays cast radiance wherever a man might kneel or stand to pray.

As we came in, a group of worshippers faded away, soundlessly, at the farther door, the sharp blow of whose closing told us they had really been there and had gone. We saw none save each other; but at moments a footstep, half-muffled, many-echoed, would start from an invisible space and clatter, ghost-like, from stone to stone.

I prayed for the boy, prayed selfishly that he might be spared to me—I, who lay no claim to creed but know the power of prayer. And while I prayed selfishly for him, I believe Paul prayed for me—but his prayer was generous: his features, noble as always, still boyish and yet with the firmness of manhood, were transfigured as they may have been on that day long ago in Verviller, which had seemed “very wonderful.”

Silently leaving, we crossed the ringing blocks, historic

prodigies of paving, which hem in the Cathedral of St. Louis; and, walking on, we entered a small unlighted street, all mystery, hard by the high wall of the horticultural gardens. People live in that street, yet few are heard to pass by night or are seen by day; a wall with doors that never open shuts off one side, and houses posing as tenantless guard the other. Few seem to pass; but echoes there claim tribute from each step, each breath, each leaf that wanders, mystery-haunted, within its precincts.

Paul spoke softly:

"I said I couldn't believe in the voice any more. Ever since the old days, it has prompted me, often; and when I haven't listened I've been sorry afterwards. Explain it? I can't; not any more than Socrates could; but at least I don't pretend, like professors and worldly wisemen, to know better than Socrates and call him virtually a fool simply because he had to accept the evidence of his senses. I don't know what it is; but I know it's there, and I recognise it when I hear it, quite distinct from conscience or imagination. In fact, it often goes against my impulses or desires. But it's never contrary to what proves eventually to have been right. I said never; I should have said never until that day at the ambulance. You remember? The voice tried to guide me wrong. It kept repeating: 'Paul, you have done your share. You are freed from obligations. Let others do their share. Return to lead your life as it was meant to be, return to prepare for your work.' Now, I knew I hadn't done enough; I knew I oughtn't to be inactive. And I knew—I know I'm not worthy, any more, of the big work I used to aspire to, once. So I answered myself: 'This is not the voice. This time you are a victim of imagination. And though it were the voice, you must not obey it where you feel it is

wrong.' But I've understood, since, that it had really spoken."

"How?"

"Because, since I disobeyed, it has never spoken again."

VI

THE letters Paul sends me from the region of Verdun are brief, but evoke the horrors and the miseries of the campaign like nothing he has yet written. He is living a nightmare protracted for hour after hour and for week after week; a state of existence in which men are heroic demons, holding in their scarred hands the holy trust of their country's security, Lucifers toiling grimly to achieve apotheosis; an existence in which the once conflicting elements of fire and water have mingled to the utter confusion of all creatures, and part when fire consumes the very air and when water melts away the solid earth, while poor human mites, deprived alike of trust and of guarantee in an unfamiliar world, struggle and fight, fight and struggle, until they die, or rouse with dazed senses to ask how they came not to die. Paul wrote:

It is—I was about to say it is a living hell, but the word's too mild. A short while ago, somebody showed me a copy of Dante's *Inferno* with Doré's illustrations. Why, that man Doré didn't know what torture meant. He looked out of his study window into a cozy old-fashioned garden, and saw an autumn storm shaking the trees—that all.

Talking with me, he has described Verdun, famed ever since Roman days as the bulwark of France, unconquered still among the ruins hemming in its triumphant citadel. Do not those ruins form, indeed, a crown of glorious jewels, set in a circle of impregnable forts?

The town is like a palace of cards, impressive and intricate, piled storey upon storey, ready to crumble at a breath. Many houses assume a semblance of being nearly intact; one can fancy them inhabited, behind tight-closed shutters, by stubborn and courageous citizens defying evacuation orders. Those houses are, perhaps, more ominous than heaps of wreckage; for a shell has entered treacherously, making but a hole in the outer wall or the roof, and has pulverised the interior or uprooted the foundations, leaving intact only a species of mask. Is this what German barbarians sought—to revive in France the heathenish legend of the Lorelei whose smile lures the guileless to wander on, and perish?

But though houses collapse, and though they bring death, Verdun will not fall; for with Verdun as with Sparta, her armies are her walls and the soldiers are the bricks.

Around these phantasmal but immortal ruins, villages are strewn, or what were villages once; some still showing groups of pierced roofs and broken masonry; others, mere heaps of refuse; many, but spots on a desolate plain. Where forests waved, the pride and the splendour of Lorraine, sticks of brushwood are scattered or stuck erect. The earth itself—but who speaks of earth? This is no longer the gnarled surface of old mother earth; it is her seamed and ravaged face, marred and pitted beyond recognition by the scourge of small-pox; features once fair, and ever to be loved, now disfigured, repulsive, terrible.

A difficult period has had to be weathered, with daily fighting on a fragmentary scale and indefinite biding for a solution, while a new and inexperienced, though all-powerful, ally forms its forces for the decisive onslaught.

An anxious time for those who are scrapping and stopping, scrapping and stopping, whereas their indomitable courage and their overwrought nerves ask only to fight and win and be done with it; an anxious time, too, for us at the rear, who calculate the risks already run, and the extraordinary chance which has allowed our dear ones to be spared—so far.

Paul no longer asks "why" he is avoided by the hail of steel falling all round him; he takes for granted both the general danger and his present immunity.

"There's a funny thing about shells when you hear them coming," he has remarked. "You often fear that particular one may get a comrade, but you never think it could be for you. Even if you are in the open and lie down, it's just because a wee splinter might reach you, but you never imagine you could be killed.—Luckily!"

I had seen Paul more frequently than I could have hoped yet not with the joy on which I might have had a right to count. He would be brought back by a complication from his old wound, or by an unexplained fever or disorder. Before the doctors pronounced him convalescent, he would demand to be off again. I began to suspect that in addition to a half-maimed limb, he had to bear with a deeply shaken nervous system. He never complained; but I recall that he said to me:

"The war will come to an end, sooner or later, and some of us will be left. But what can ever compensate us for what we have gone through? I know men in the twenties who are already worn out, and by no fault of theirs; the mainspring's weakened, and the mechanism's used up; they will find themselves old men when they want to begin life. They may try to forget; but they have lost what can't be forgotten."

I left my Verviller house to Marcel, and took a flat in Paris, so that Paul might have diversions when on leave. That was the motive I alleged; but I had borne in mind the little affair with his "cousin" Mademoiselle de Clermont. The Marquise de Vervillers would occasionally invite me to her house for lunch, a meal shared by the ladies helping at her hospital and served in the private apartments reserved on the first floor. I gathered the impression that the late Baron de Clermont's only daughter had not entirely dismissed the image of one among her many patients; and I hoped that Paul might stand as good a chance as any one, and better than most, to win the hand of this charming young aristocrat. By discussing Breton legends, I gathered from Mademoiselle de Clermont notions of the localities connected with her name, and so was able to set qualified persons to work, diligently investigating parish and township registers for possible clues to Paul's ancestry.

He and she were no more than very good friends, when they met; and such were the ideal relations for them, at this juncture. But I noticed that he told her much that one need not relate to casual friends. I know indeed that he told his entire story; and I saw for myself that it placed no barrier between them. Then I thought the time come to talk with the Marquise de Vervillers about the settlement I had made on him. Of course the good lady is above vulgar, sordid considerations; it is because of her genuine interest in Paul that she has ever since treated him almost like a child of her own.

He has again been at her hospital. Oddly enough, parting from me not long before, he had said:

"Next time I see you, it will be because of a wound. My turn hasn't come yet, I think; but I'm going to be wounded."

I tried to laugh it off, though I had heard many strange instances of soldiers who have made such prophecies, and been right.

"Of course," I said, "if you go hunting for it——"

"No," he answered soberly. "It doesn't come that way."

Nor did it.

It hunted him out in his shell-proof. Two nights previously, he had led a raid, accomplishing a perilous mission and bringing back the prisoners and the information wanted, and also all his own men though several were wounded. He stood peacefully and in apparent security, at rest with his hands in his pockets, when a shell broke through and burst, killing an officer and two soldiers, and wounding him thrice, in hip and side and shoulder.

So great had been the number of wounded, that no anæsthetics remained at the nearest ambulance. The operation was judged imperatively urgent, and he was butchered in the live flesh. He says all went fairly well for the extraction of the first bit, but he lost his self-control and fought against those who held him down for the second, and went off raving in delirium when it came to the third. Complications were averted by the promptness of this ghastly intervention; that is, all physical complications save a slight limp; but ever since, I have watched him with an indefinable concern.

What I noticed at first was no more than an occasional tone—a look—how could I tell? For I did not yet know. A species of apprehension seemed to hang over him, which was not a form of fear; and I could discern no further.

I was certain it could not be fear, not only by his words but because I saw him tested repeatedly at what we called in jest the "Paris front," a spot more exposed, indeed,

than certain sectors. We who had grown accustomed to the quietude of Paris have weathered a series of raids and alarms; we have had them by night, and night upon night, and several times in a night; and we have had long-distance bombardments by day, from sunrise to sunset, until the dull, re-echoing thud of shells bursting at regular intervals, but more or less remote, more or less resonant, were as familiar to us as the siren's lonely wail and the hysterical gasp of horns, or as the boom of the cannon and the cracking of shrapnel and of machine-guns.

He and I have been near the places where bombs or shells burst; and we have visited the scenes of greatest havoc. We have seen the dead and the mutilated; and we have found houses with a storey or two destroyed, and buildings with scarred faces, and innumerable smashed window-panes, and iron shutters cut as by giant shears, and drains blown up, and holes in asphalt or wooden pavements. Thousands of people viewed all this; they were neither frightened nor emotional. On the scene of the grim spectacle, they spoke little; then they would go about their business, and the life of Paris proceeded as before.

What a poor result for so much scheming and attempting, so much violation of human laws; so much science devoted, money expended, energy concentrated; so much resolve to win, whatever the means employed:—a little innocent blood shed, a few homes destroyed, a large masons' and glaziers' and plumbers' and carpenters' bill for future reckoning—and Paris going about its business as before!

No; even with the shocks of these recent wounds and the operation, added to his existing troubles, Paul had no fear; yet I guessed an intangible apprehension. That idea, or that inkling of an idea, was the nearest I approached to the

truth until one evening when he told a story to amuse us—Madame de Vervillers, Mademoiselle de Clermont, and myself.

As he spoke, he became his old self once again, gay and graphic; it was long since I had heard him in this vein, and a weight was lifted from my spirit. Whatever had happened, he was still faithful and trusting, and likely to say "It doesn't matter" when everything failed him, and his heart was near breaking. I had done what a guardian could, my part was ended: he would not again draw inspiration from me. But for the sake of the woman he desired as his mate, he had recovered the qualities which I thought dead; and as she listened, I knew that she was not indifferent. Yet it was this tale, begun so simply and with a single motive, which in the end betrayed a truth constantly present to me ever since, as it had already become a brooding, inseparable part of himself.

"There's somebody we mind much more than Fritz, and that's Monsieur Cafard," he said lightly. "Fritz may not have any sense of shame, but he has a wholesome sense of retirement, and he doesn't show himself unless he has to. But Monsieur Cafard sticks at nothing, he lacks the commonest prudence as well as discretion."

"You mean homesickness, of course," I commented, although I began to be puzzled.

"No, I mean exactly what, or rather whom, I say, Monsieur Cafard. He's quite different from the ordinary cafard we used to have. That was a condition, and it came at you in another way. You were lonesome and melancholy, and you mooned about for a little while before either recovering or else going home, and that was the end of it.

"But Monsieur Cafard won't be treated so casually, not at any price. He's after you quick as a flash, before you know you are lonely or melancholy. There's no period allowed for mooning, and there's no going home. And he attacks most viciously when you've just got back from leave and there's no prospect of home again for four months, unless you get smashed. That's one of the respects in which Monsieur Cafard shows his lack of decency and fair play."

"A Boche behaves better, then?" Mademoiselle de Clermont prompted.

"Fritz," Paul corrected. "The word Boche is passing out. You know the course of slang. We run it into the ground, and then we tire of it and fling it aside. So, from the day we got the Boches thoroughly in the ground, and several storeys deep, too, the word was doomed.

"I wouldn't pretend Fritz is a pleasant customer. But he's easier and healthier to deal with than Monsieur Cafard. If you kill him you kill him, and you can say to yourself afterwards, 'There's one less, anyhow.' The chief trouble with Monsieur Cafard is that you can't kill him. However hard you hit when driving him away this time, he'll be at you again the very next moment, unless you're careful. Kill him? Why, you can't even tire the beggar! We get relative relief from him only when we're hard driven fighting Fritz and haven't a chance to think. Yet the first line itself isn't an entire protection against Monsieur Cafard, for we must rest at certain hours. It's not fair, I say. He hasn't the least notion of honourable conduct. If he weren't so tough and adaptable, I should believe he was Made in Germany. But he's too well-built for that; he's of good materials and sound workmanship—worse luck!"

Already, I had known of *cafard* as a condition, and I had been able to accept him as a personality. This new mechanical metaphor, however, got me seriously mixed. I ventured to state the fact.

"So is he mixed," Paul replied calmly. "And so are we, when he gets at us. As I've already told you, it's not just homesickness; nor is it just depression, nor just loneliness, nor just idleness. There's all of that, and weariness too; and there's a big share of ennui, and rage at seeing ourselves in such a mess; and there are memories of all sorts of things, nice and ugly, what we'd like to have and what we've got to accept, all jumbled up together. Once our thoughts have taken that mould, we're no longer prey to a simple mood, we're at grips with an active, resourceful, murderous enemy, full of wile and as steady as clock-work. Yes, he's a condition and a mechanism, both; but he's a real live creature besides, and we call him *Monsieur Cafard*."

In the heat of things, a man might at least be free from *Monsieur Cafard*, he said. Yet not always. Even extreme danger was not a guarantee, if opportunities for struggling were eliminated, and if melancholy complications were piled on while you waited.

For instance, knocking about in barbed wires at night, for one reason or another, and having rockets go off unexpectedly, and then hearing machine-guns turned loose, was part of the game and nobody kicked against the principle of it. But according to circumstances, *Monsieur Cafard* might be very close or else quite forgotten.

Only a week before, Paul had had to go on a job of the kind, a reconnoissance, with three men. They had to pass through the worst *chicane* he had yet met, a narrow and sharp-turning lane between fields of wire; and often they

had to work their way underneath. Their helmets kept striking and ringing against the steel points; and of course rockets would go up, and machine-guns would begin spitting; but things would quiet down, and the men would creep on once more.

They finished the job, and were on their way back. It had been rather nerve-racking, but not too bad, as such things go. Then, when they had got within a few yards of safety, the moon rose suddenly from a bank of heavy cloud and flooded the whole country with light. Taken by surprise, they all threw themselves flat, while bullets rained round them. For ten minutes they didn't move. The fire slowed down, they started to crawl forward; they were both seen and heard, and the fire began afresh.

For very nearly an hour this went on: an attempt to start as soon as quiet came, and the machine-guns after them like cats after mice before they had crawled more than a few inches. It was hideous. But not for one instant did Monsieur Cafard get near them. They were too closely concentrated on the wish to profit by every tiny hope for drawing a little nearer to safety; though death seemed inevitable, they could still struggle.

On such occasions, Monsieur Cafard felt he might afford to stand clear; his chance would be sure to come again, soon enough.

A perfect opportunity for him came, once, in a really pleasant landscape, a rough country riddled with shell-holes, rich in logs and tree-stumps mixed with wire, more mud than had ever been brought together since the Flood subsided, and a night as black as you make them. Paul and his men had been detailed to carry torpedoes to the crapouillot bombardiers in the first line; they had five miles to go, each with that heavy weight on his shoulders

and permission to halt and shift it to the other side at the end of every mile.

A rocket blazed up, one of those confounded new rockets which make no noise until they flare, and so they catch you at work. The men with their torpedoes were seen as plainly as by day, and the German machine-guns began their *tac-tac-tac, tac-à-tac*. Only one thing could be done; orders were whispered to lie down and "swim," each man with his torpedo on his back.

No prospect of escape, or relief, or struggle, or anything else containing hope; and the certainty that the fire would continue long, with such fine game to hunt. You had to lie there in the mud, with that torpedo on your back, and the hail of bullets striking all round you; and when you got up, it would be to creep on a little farther with your load, growing heavier while you grew sorer at each step which drew you closer to danger.

As Paul and his comrades lay, silent and miserable, thinking of this, a finishing touch was added. Rain fell, a fine, stealthy drizzle soaking steadily into the flesh. That was the diabolical exaggeration of misery which Monsieur Cafard's ingeniousness had devised, to complete the effects of weary muscles and aching bones and oozy mud and pelting bullets and hideous night.

It was too much for the men. They absolutely gave up. And Monsieur Cafard revelled in his ignoble triumph.

But he had failed to take into account the fact that they had their regimental fool with them. An utter, hopeless fool, and generally useless, save for playing the fool. Not having brains enough to appreciate the extreme forlornness surrounding them all, and not having a single thought in his head to make him more wretched by comparison, he

chose to find something funny in the angle at which a comrade raised his nose for an instant.

"You look like a duck bobbing for water," murmured Durancy the fool. "Haven't you got enough water as it is?"

From sheer wretchedness, Paul laughed in a subdued sort of way, and some of his neighbours followed suit. Ranelle, who was no fool, saw his opening and threw down a challenge to Monsieur Cafard by sighing out in a squeaky sing-song whisper:

"'Tis not for us, boys, 'tis for F-r-r-r-rance!"

Another quickly braced up and added his word; though a poor one, it helped:

"Oh, mother, why did you give me a back when I was born?"

That sufficed. The fun had been started, and they kept it going as their last hope upon earth. They got Monsieur Cafard roundly on the run. And presently the rain stopped, and Fritz let up with his machine-guns, and they all shouldered their torpedoes once more and went on their way, feeling really happy.

"You see," Paul observed, "having downed our most inveterate enemy, we didn't mind poor Fritz. Everything's in the method, but thank God for a fool, once in a while."

"Have you, then, a regular method for fighting off Monsieur Cafard, or does it just depend?" Mademoiselle de Clermont laughed.

"Both. The main thing is to know his nature as well as he knows yours. Monsieur Cafard does not like happiness; and another thing he hates is light. He is sure to score in a gloomy dug-out when you lack elementary comforts and essential decencies, and everybody's too nervous

to sleep. I believe the thing which makes him angriest of all is a fire in winter. He likes to see you shivering miserably in a big old barn, with wind and rain blowing in from everywhere and no warmth anywhere.

"Sometimes we are able to rig up a stove out of a piece of old grate from the wreck of a house; and if we're lucky enough to find a battered boiler and any sort of a pipe, then our stove's complete. Or no, I don't quite mean any sort of pipe. Lead won't do, it melts, as we found out by sad experience. We lacked heat, that night, but at least Monsieur Cafard didn't get us, for we never laughed more—especially as Ranelle just missed a ladleful of hot lead on his head. Another return to mediæval ways of war, you see!

"It's astonishing how much can be learned by experience. For instance, we've learned not to do too much damage when we take possession of a deserted house and start fires going in huge old-fashioned chimneys. We used to start the chimney itself off, every time. Now, we generally avoid that. Too dangerous for ourselves.

"We had got a glorious blaze going in a place of the kind, which was the only shelter for miles and miles. Suddenly we heard a terrific roaring above. The whole chimney was a mass of flames, inside; and it was an exceptionally large chimney. Quick as thought, we rammed things in below, to stop the draught. But a different sort of row broke loose, like a machine-gun attack on a small scale. At first we thought the chimney was about to explode. Then bullets whizzed in, and we understood somebody was shooting.

"Fritzes? Not one bit of it. That fool of a Durancy had been told, as a boy, that the surest way to put out a chimney-fire was to shoot off a fowling-piece into the fire-

place. Being Durancy, he climbed on the roof instead, and not having a fowling-piece, turned loose with his rifle, emptying the magazine down the chimney as fast as he could re-load.

"When we caught on, we fell to laughing so that we could hardly get out of the way of his shots; several of us just missed getting our skin punched; two of us tumbled from the roof as we tried to reach him and stop his activities. His rifle was nicely cleaned for inspection next day, I can promise you. As for us, we'd had our laugh.

"Monsieur Cafard has no use for scenes like that. But he's mean enough to take a dirty vengeance, when the fun is over.

"I remember particularly one night of terrific cold, when the men had collected a lot of wood to burn on an improvised brasero, in a leaky loft. If the fire went out they would change to icicles while asleep. So, before turning in, they piled on the wood. Anybody who happened to be awake later was to add more—you know that sort of arrangement. What wasn't known at the time was that somebody had set a big bean up on end, like a mast or a tent-pole, in the very middle of the blaze. It stood steadily, the base being broad and sawed straight; and that sufficed for him. We are all positive it could have been nobody except Durancy.

"Ranelle, who's a pretty good chap, had staid up, fortunately, having a chat with the cook in the barn beneath. He saw showers of sparks come down through the gaps, and he chased up the ladder before it was too late.

"The men put all the blame on Durancy; they said his beam, or joy-mast, or whatever you choose to call it, had flopped over by force of circumstances when its base got

charred away, and so it set the floor afire. But I knew Durancy was only partially responsible, and I said so; which pleased him, because he didn't acknowledge having put the beam there. I knew they had never been more successful in driving Monsieur Cafard away, than that evening up to the moment when they dropped off to sleep, all warm and comfortable. And so our enemy——"

Paul broke off abruptly; his attention had wandered. Near at hand there was a sound of knocking against a wall, slow heavy thuds as from a workman's pick.

"Boom—Boom—Boom," he muttered, as each successive blow fell. "Why can't they stop that noise? One doesn't mind being in the thick of it. But to sit up and listen to feeble imitations is just begging Monsieur Cafard to come catch you. It's enough to—— Why did you stop talking? Or did I stop? What was I saying?"

"You were explaining the surest ways for defeating Monsieur Cafard," I answered, pointedly.

"The system consists in keeping the fun going," he returned. "You seize any excuse for being cheerful in spite of everything."

"And suppose you don't succeed?" I rashly asked.

"Suppose we don't succeed," he repeated after a good many moments of reflection. "Why, then Monsieur Cafard gets us. You hear about bad cases of neurasthenia—but it's Monsieur Cafard. A man may go mad, once in a while—it's Monsieur Cafard. A man may kill himself after a trifling reprimand—Monsieur Cafard. Or he may lose his head and show lack of respect towards an officer—still Monsieur Cafard."

"I'm of a flegmatic temperament, or so the others tell me. With the crowd, I can keep up my spirits as well as the rest. But sometimes——"

Paul had positively changed colour; his fingers and the corners of his mouth were twitching.

"I say!" he burst out violently, turning upon me with a swift movement. "Why can't you change the subject?"

The expression in his eyes appalled me; and I saw Mademoiselle de Clermont look away in pain rather than in horror.

When we were alone, Paul made his confession:

"I—I don't know what comes over me, at such times. I'm all right, of course; but since my last wounds, coming after the Verdun fighting, I—I can't explain. It's foolish, it's humiliating; and besides, it fills me with a dread worse than anything: the dread of losing my nerve. I'm not a coward yet. But suppose I ever am?" He shuddered and broke off.

Later, I said to Mademoiselle de Clermont:

"What do you think of Paul's condition?"

"I think he is a hero," was her reply.

My conclusion was that Paul, having already a part-useless arm unfitting him for self-defence, and being now wrecked by further strain and serious wounds, must not be for the present with an active unit. I believe I could have secured for him an appointment in some connection with the American Army; he was certainly qualified by his wounds, by his knowledge and experience of fighting conditions, and by his familiarity with the French and English languages. But he would not allow me to take steps to this effect. He has made up his mind to serve to the end among his own people, for the avenging of their own wrongs. He has a man's right to decide, since he has done a man's work. I reproach him with his lack of reason, while I bow before his will.

My plans led me to visit our American troops in training; and though I failed to influence Paul, I am the richer for impressions which have filled him, as they have myself, with admiration and with confidence. What men,—lithe, and comely, and athletic, cheerful-hearted, strictly disciplined, marvellously developed, supple and sure as the finest steel, superb and clean as the youth of America can be; preparing to fight for a principle, for a cause, for their country and for other countries, preparing to fight not because they hated but because they had to fight, and resolved to do it well because it was their custom to do well all things whatever they undertook in life! Their spirit seemed to soar as Quentin Roosevelt soared, eager and sincere, unassumingly courageous and unswervingly resolute, ardent with the desire to conquer, iron-willed but golden-hearted, triumphant over death itself.

I have returned to Verviller. Paul writes to me now from the Reims sector. The work of barbarous destruction has been raging furiously. An officer who passed there has described the town as "heaps of stone, piles of ashes, awful wreckage, where nothing in the way of buildings can be recognised." Yet one thing, lamentable in its martyrdom, can still be identified from all points of the desolate landscape: the seared Cathedral, standing in ghostly semblance of its olden form.

If, as I have sometimes thought, the first bombardment of Reims marked a turning-point in the spirit of France, I believe the present furious, insatiable vandalism against a spot whose sole offence is its traditional beauty and holiness will mark another and even wider change.

Then, the country had tasted the bitterness of reverses,

before experiencing the sweetness of reawakened hopes and of newly hardened resolution. Since then, France has given proofs of inexhaustible courage, and she holds more than hope—she grasps sureties of triumph. These do not consist of mere material stakes torn from the enemy. They consist in the work of her soldiers, in the brains of her officers, in the resolution of her rulers; in the loyalty, the energy, the effective help of powerful Allies; and in her own patient fortitude through years of unequalled self-abnegation and of steadfast, irresistible endeavour.

Yet, with the thought of Paul lying like a leaden weight within my bosom, I ask myself what even the wanton destruction of homes, as of smiling fields and works of art, can matter. The graves of our dead are with us; and before us are the dreary years to be lived by countless thousands of youths who will have to plunge, unfitted, into the struggling seas of life.

This is the day of the wounded, the maimed, the ruined. We take thought for them, we protect them, we love them. But the day may come when they will no longer be heroes, when they will merely be young men whose strong manhood, whose flower of vigour, whose glorious promise of activity and of utility have been cut off.

Cut off by the will of a few, perhaps: but with what glad patriotism, with what arrogant megalomania the hordes obeyed the dictates of that will, and made its aims their own! Cut off, that the sword might shine and the powder flash, that material aggrandisement might extend beyond conceivable limits, that materialist philosophy might be imposed upon a world of slaves,—and that Germany might secure larger, better seaports, wider water-ways, stretching out her triumphant wings to the west until the setting sun,

clouded in their shadow, should sink to a mockery of rest in oceans of noble blood.

The crime of crimes is doubly the holocaust of the irreparable dead and the brand of suffering, of moral and physical infirmity, which years cannot alter nor efface. And so, in all justice, the least which can be asked of the world at large is, to Remember. These heroes to-day will to-morrow be only ruins—if, in selfishness and in abasement, we close our ears and our eyes and our hearts, we seal up our memories and our consciences,—and dare to forget.

It is in order that I may not forget—not forget for the space of one mortal instant—that I have returned to Verviller, to the place made most sacred to me by what it has suffered, and by its association with one who has already been called upon to give everything he had, save bare life.

The news has been good, of late. Germany's resources are evidently running short. The end cannot be far off. Paul has received the Croix de Guerre with a silver star, after a particularly daring and successful *coup-de-main*. He has been recommended for a four-month course as Aspirant at St. Cyr, to be given his commission upon returning to the trenches; but of course he cannot leave his unit while these offensives continue.

Marcel has grown active and prosperous in a reviving community. His sole preoccupation, indeed, would seem to be a darkness which, in spite of me, sometimes descends upon my spirits. He cheers me with ever the same halting step and hearty cry:

“And what of it, Père Aubret? Haven't others gone through the mill and come back, not much the worse for

being winged? Besides, doesn't Paul wear the scapulary Mademoiselle de Clermont gave him? Only for her sake, of course!"

VII

MARCEL has just left me. I have promised I would try to sleep. Instead, I take out these pages. Where do I find courage to write? Perhaps in that this always served to draw me nearer to my boy.

It has come. The news which was bound to come. Last night, a parcel was brought; things which belonged to him. To-day, a letter. All addressed to Marcel Lavenu. He waited for the letter, before telling me of the parcel.

"Durancy." That is the signature. I have seen the name, or heard it. The letter is from him.

Five men were to repair the barbed maze. . . . Murderous fire. . . . Sergeant Clermont volunteered, so only four men. . . .

Yes. Sergeant Clermont never failed.

They do the work, and return unharmed. But a tool is missing. A special tool, hard to replace. Whose? Durancy confesses: "Mine." Those are tear-blots on the page, I think. Dried tear-blots. These others, here, are wet.

Durancy admits it. He forgot the tool. "It must be recovered." But he will not go. He refused. He admits this, too. Face danger, do the work, and return safely, yes—once. But go a second time, when every gun from the German trenches is being emptied into that maze? No,

not that sort of death! Not suicide! For God's sake, wait till this fire slows down. The tool be ruined? To the devil with the tool!—Or blow out his brains as he stands, then!

Sergeant Paul has neither argued nor threatened. I know Sergeant Paul. He must have seen the poor wretch turn pale and start a-trembling; he has heard the death-rattle of a thousand bullets. He will not send a coward to sure death. A man is needed for that.

Before we suspect what he is doing, he leaps out. . . .

They see him reach the spot, and seize the tool; they see him returning. They see him within a few yards of the trench, and are about to cheer. Then they see him wounded. They forget danger, and spring to his relief—Durancy with the rest. Durancy was one of the three who brought him in.

The boy was dying. His eyes must have been of their deep grey, when he opened them. He wanted to speak. They listened, bending over him.

I have an uncle who loved me. This might kill him. One of you must write. Not to him. Write to Marcel Lavenu. Quickly, before he can hear. The address—

His hand reached feebly towards his breast; he smiled upon them one by one, his grey eyes still deepening; he looked last upon Durancy, for an instant longer and with an even gentler message than for all the rest—and died.

"Why—why?" Aye, Paul—why do I weep here, alone in my desolation?

Turning these pages, my eyes fall on lines written of his youth:

332 THE GIFT OF PAUL CLERMONT

One afternoon, on the hill above Verviller . . . Paul had sought me out . . . In my ears the words rang: "I would rather be killed than kill. . . . Like an echo . . . a veiled, scarcely audible whisper reached me: "It's better to go to prison than send a comrade there."

Paul had been true to his life.

THE END

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